

Midwinter



By the author of MEHITABLE

KATHARINE ADAMS

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Author of "MEHITABLE"

MIDWINTER takes you to Sweden, where a group of young people are spending the Christmas holidays. Audrey Bradford and Stella West, with their friends, Nore and Donski, two Swedish boys who have been studying art in Paris, discover Guldviva, the strange little peasant girl who lives by herself in a forest of silver birches.

Guldviva soon becomes the center of interest in a strange mystery, and when the climax comes and Guldviva is kidnapped and carried off to Lapland, it is Nore, her artist friend, who goes to her rescue.

In a book that breathes the very air of Sweden, girls will find mystery, romance, and that special story-telling quality which has long made the books of Katharine Adams beloved by thousands of readers.

GROSSET & DUNLAP *Publishers*
NEW YORK 10, N. Y.



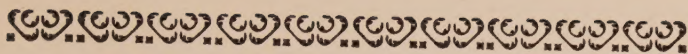
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Midwinter

BOOKS BY
KATHARINE ADAMS

Mehitable
The Silver Tarn
Midsummer
Midwinter
Wisp, A Girl of Dublin
Red Caps and Lilies
Blackthorn



Midwinter

BY KATHARINE ADAMS



Grosset & Dunlap

PUBLISHERS

NEW YORK

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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Midwinter

CHAPTER I

NORE

"PARIS—what do you make of Paris?"

Domski asked the question from his perch on a broad window seat. He was thin and short and he had a shock of dark hair that flopped about his bright eyes as he leaned forward, his chin on his hand. He wore an olive-green apron over his snuff-colored suit. It was tied about his neck, a flaring, stiffly starched bow sticking out each side of his ears.

Nore Essen turned around and looked at him, his palette and paintbrush in his hands. There was just the touch of a smile on his face as he answered:

"Paris is well enough, but of course it is not Stockholm. There is art here, but it is not the art that is most wonderful; it is not free enough. You look like a frog sitting there in the dusk, Domski, a frog or a gnome or—well—something at any rate that I should like to paint if I did not have to drudge away at this portrait. I'm hungry. Let's eat." As he finished speaking, Nore gathered up his brushes.

He wore a rough gray smock, clean except for a smear of purple paint across his left shoulder.

Domski jumped off the window sill.

"I'll make an omelet and you will have coffee, not sawdust and chicory, but real coffee, and you will perhaps have the fig pudding heated up——"

"Bread and some of the good cheese is all I want. Yes, and coffee, too. We will have supper and talk of Sweden."

Nore spoke between gasps of breath for he was carrying a polished, carved-wood table into the center of the room.

"Uncle Eugene will not be pleased with the mark the hot vegetable dish made," he went on as he put the table down. "Throw me the heavy cloth, Domski, and do *not* throw the dishes." Nore laughed, for Domski had made a motion of throwing a plate at him.

"I'll set the table and, yes, you might make an omelet, after all; you are so fond of making them," Nore announced, spreading a green and white cloth in a leisurely way. Then he went over to the window and stood looking out at the bleak grayness while Domski bustled about with eggs and butter.

There was a gas stove behind a red curtain in a small room off the studio and Domski's omelet could soon be heard sizzling in the frying pan. Nore still stood at the window looking out at a dim, gusty square in an old part of Paris. He was tall for his seventeen years and there was a gravity about his face which made him look older.

A few minutes later he and Donski sat at supper.

The room in which they sat was large and quite bare with high ceilings. Two easels stood propped against the wall in a shadowy corner. There were several unfinished paintings on the walls. The floor was bare except for a large woven rug of bright colors. There was a wood fire in a small fireplace at the end of the room. An iron cover was pulled halfway down in front of the fire and the flames danced fantastically beneath it.

The two boys ate for a few minutes in silence. It was Nore who spoke first. He put down his fork and leaned his elbows on the table.

"Did you ever know what it was to be homesick, Donski?" he asked.

Donski ate thoughtfully. For a moment his face was very grave. Then a smile lit up his thin, square face.

"You know well enough, Nore. We have told you often, the Master and I, that I have never had a home and that until I was ten I traveled about in Russia with my father who was a musician. Then after he died the Master took pity on me and had me with him and, as you well know, Nore, the Master is always moving about. First it is San Raphael, next the Corniche Alps or Paris, Rome, Stockholm. Wherever he wants most to paint, that is where we go, the Master and I. Even now, as you know, after just returning from Venice, he has gone to Russia! I should have been with him taking care of him, but he said to me, 'Nore will be lonely.

He longs for Sweden. It is well for you to stay and look after him.' "

Domski spoke rapidly, emphasizing his remarks with quick sidewise waves of his hands. He still wore the green apron tied about his neck and he wiped his face, hot from his exertions over the stove, with a red and white silk handkerchief.

"He was right. I do need you. We need each other, for it seems as though just now neither of us really has a home. I feel like growling—throwing things."

Nore smiled, then frowned the next moment, as he munched a crust of bread.

Domski leaned forward eagerly. "The castle on the rocks in Sweden. Do you not think of it often? It is your home."

Nore lifted his head a little proudly.

"No, not that. My real home is the little fisher hut across the bay. It is of that I think, and of my mother and brother and of my sisters Marta and Thure." Nore pushed his chair back. "It is stupid to be homesick when there is all the world to see, when there is art and beauty."

Domski took a draught of coffee, nodding his head appreciatively. After he swallowed the last drop he turned in his jerky way toward Nore.

"Do you not think at all of the castle on the rocks?" he asked curiously. "Your grandfather died so soon after you knew him, but do you not think of the lonely old castle?"

"Yes, and of Audrey and Sven in America, and

of Tante Greta in Sweden. It is all so strange to me. Does it not seem strange to you too, Domski, that Audrey is my cousin? She is an American girl and yet she is my cousin."

Domski nodded emphatically and gathered the dishes together.

"She is wonderful. It was she who discovered that you were Nore Essen, instead of Nore Carlson. She is so full of living. She thinks so fast. She plans and she carries out her plans. She came to her relatives for one summer in Sweden and she did much."

Domski stood balancing a tray of dishes precariously, and went on speaking rapidly as he carried them across the room to a table behind the curtain.

"Was it not all wonderful, the summer two years ago! There were the Master Eugene and I in the studio in the old part of Stockholm, he hoping and dreading always to find his sister's son." Domski left the dishes and came up to Nore, twirling a red and white dishcloth excitedly.

"Is it not wonderful to think of—the summer two years ago?" he repeated. And then, before Nore could answer, "You were just Nore Carlson, a fisher boy, then, and it all worked out like a puzzle, don't you see, each piece fitting neatly into its place. It all worked out. Audrey Bradford discovered you were exactly like the painting of her Uncle Rudolph in the tower of the castle on the rocks. She found out that the Master Eugene had been Rudolph's friend and had married his sister and

had been sent away because your grandfather hated the Russians and Eugene was Russian. Is it not wonderful?" Domski repeated.

Nore's face had grown a little white as Domski was speaking. He did not answer at once, but picked up the table and carried it back to its place against the wall. Then he looked off out of the window.

"It is snowing a little," he said. "It is almost December. This isn't real snow, but we would find it if we went north," he went on dreamily. Turning, he went over to the fire and sat down beside it.

Domski came over to the fire and shoved up the iron cover in front of it. A great roaring greeted them and the warmth of fast blazing wood. Domski sat down by Nore's side.

"Tell me, do you not think it was wonderful, that summer two years ago?" he repeated.

Nore nodded.

"Does it not come over you suddenly, the strangeness of it all—that you are really the grandson of the old Count Essen and not just Nore Carlson, a fisher boy?"

Domski was so eager and interested that his black eyes blazed like coals of fire. He looked so quaint, leaning forward in his green apron, that Nore smiled, although a shadow touched his face.

Before he could answer, Domski went on speaking:

"You do not regret that you found me that time by the palace steps in Stockholm and rescued me

from the bad boys who were teasing me? No, no, I am sure you do not. I brought you to Master Eugene's studio. You said then it was your dream to be an artist. *Voilà!*"—Donski spread out his hands: "your dream has come true. You are studying in Paris; last spring in Rome and Florence you saw the pictures of the great masters——"

Nore interrupted, with a laugh:

"Yes, yes, that is true, Donski, and I am thankful indeed that I found you by the palace steps." He leaned back, looking out at a faint glimmer of snow beyond the darkening windowpane. "It will be wonderful indeed if I am ever a great artist, because that was the hope of the one who took me when I was brought a baby from Russia, and cared for me and loved me." Nore spoke slowly. Then he looked off again out of the window.

"It is snowing a little, but it's not real snow. We would find it, though, if we went farther north. We would find it in Sweden. It calls me—Sweden. It calls me always, I think, but the call is loudest when the snow comes. When it grows nearer to—midwinter."

He turned away, his hand on the end of a wooden shelf, painted green. He picked up a small photograph from the shelf and stood there in the shadowy corner, looking at it. It was a crude kodak picture, somewhat faded, the picture of a young girl standing under a birch tree. She was straight and tall, and there was a far-away look in her eyes. "Sweden calls me," Nore repeated.

CHAPTER II

GULDVIVA

It was an odd sound. There was something almost sinister about it, something unearthly. It was the sound of a forest of ice-coated birch trees swaying in a bitter northern wind.

Guldviva was so accustomed to the sound that she never thought of it at all. It had lulled her to sleep from the time of her babyhood. She had always lived in the heart of the birch wood and it was as much a part of her life as the low square little house where she was born, the house with the pointed roof, moss-covered in summer and ice-covered in winter. She loved the birch forest with a deep devotion and all the wild things that lived in it were her friends.

Guldviva had had no other close friends except the Carlson family who used to live near by in a fishing hut. Great changes had come to them, however, and Fru Carlson and her daughters and young son Karl had gone to Stockholm to live.

Guldviva loved the sound of the swaying icy birches. She knew the forest, dense as it was, and

she knew the stars, the waterways, ice bound now, along the coast, winding in and out into the welcoming bay. She knew the first upshoots of vines and green sprigs in the forest and she knew the deep hidden lairs of crafty animals.

All this Guldiviva knew and more. She knew that she had a power, a something in her which made her feel a part of the air and sun and ice, the sound of the forest and the mystery of the wind.

"The animals talk to me, Mama lilla. They tell me of their ways, their fears," she had said once to her mother, when as a tiny child she sat beside the huge white stove one winter evening, eating her rusk and milk from a wooden bowl.

"That cannot be true, my child. It is only a fancy of yours, a dream," her mother had answered her.

Guldiviva had lived alone in the long low house in the heart of the birch wood for two years, ever since her mother had gone away to the place where the sun always shone and there was always beauty. For it was so that Guldiva liked to think of heaven.

The two years had not been lonely. She was busy all day with her weaving. She had a free, happy life because she never felt lonely with the trees all about her, and in summer flowers and birds to keep her company. She had few friends among human beings and this thought sometimes made her a little sad. The Carlsons were the only friends who had come very closely into her life, and she loved them most faithfully.

She was thinking of them this early December day as she went lightly about the narrow, dim living room of her house. She thought of Fru Carlson who had often come, even in deep winter, to sit and weave with her and her mother, bringing little Thure to play quietly with her doll in front of the stove. She thought of Karl, the noisy younger boy, of Marta, her particular friend, and then, pausing suddenly and looking out into the frozen whiteness, she thought of Nore, the oldest of them all, tall, fair, quiet, shy. Nore, who fished for a living for the Carlson family, who toiled half the night over his books, who sailed the Skärgård at sunset on summer evenings, Nore, who amazingly, suddenly was found to be not a Carlson at all, but the grandson of old Count Essen, a son of the Essen who had married a Russian, Nore who had been brought to Sweden as a baby by Knut Carlson, the captain of a fishing boat and had been brought up as his own child. Nore was in Paris now studying to be an artist. The Carlsons were living in a little flat in Stockholm. It seemed to Guldviva that all the world was changing, only the trees and flowers and she herself stayed in the birch-wood forest.

She went suddenly to the heavy door leading from the living room to the icy doorstep, opened it and stood looking out, the sweet, icy air sweeping in about her. She was just sixteen, slender and very strong. She held her head a little upward as though she were listening.

It was breathlessly still outside except for the creaking moan of the forest and now and then a faint singing through silver wood aisles, guarded by birches like ghostly sentinels, but Guldviva thought she heard footsteps and she had come to the door to listen. It was too early for Jon Jarlsen to come with the milk. Old Hjalmar from the castle was too bad with rheumatism just then to make a friendly call as he had done so often the winter before, bringing her a bit of venison or a cake baked by the cook at the castle. No, it could not be Hjalmar, although it was a heavy step, a man's step. There were no longer gifts from the castle since it was closed for the winter. The Countess Greta had gone with a friend to a sanitarium in southern Sweden because of her rheumatism. It was too bitter cold for Fru Strom to walk over to share her supper in friendly fashion, and, at any rate, the sound was not that of a woman's tread. Unquestionably, some one was coming. Guldviva shaded her eyes, for the whiteness of the snow dazzled her a little. She had been busy at her weaving and the darkness had come creeping upon her slowly in the living room. Night comes that way in Sweden.

She leaned forward, listening. A strange man was coming up the path, straight to the house. When he came nearer, a look of surprise touched her face, for the man was clad in a heavy dull blue cloak and peaked fur cap and his face was not the face of a Swede. It was the face of a Lapp.

"Good day," she said clearly.

"Good day, Froken. May I rest for a time by your kakelugn? I have come a long way to have a word with you. I have come from Varlo, and beyond."

Guldviva stared at the man and he stared back at her. He spoke again.

"I have words for you from your people in the North," he said. He spoke Swedish haltingly.

"My people in the North," she repeated, and as she stood there in the faint light, the dusk deepening around her, a look of wide surprise spread over her face and eyes, but there was no fear there. She had never known the meaning of fear. Astonishment showed in her voice as she went on speaking:

"You do not mean up there—not Lapland!"

The man nodded, and without another word Guldviva pushed the door open farther and the stranger followed her inside.

Guldviva went over to the tall white kakelugn and picking up two small dried logs of the white birch, opened the little door of the stove and thrust them inside, closing the door again.

The man had not waited for her to ask him to be seated. He pushed a low stool forward and crouched down on it by the stove, his mittened hands outstretched toward the warmth. Guldviva stood facing him, her face pale in the deepening shadows of the room.

"What do you mean when you speak of my

people in the North? There is no one there but my grandmother if she still lives—does she live?"

The stranger nodded, pulling off his red mittens and stretching his gnarled, dirty hands again toward the warmth. His heavy boots were caked with ice which melted there by the fire, dripping onto the clean wooden floor.

"She lives and she would see you. Why should you not be a dutiful granddaughter to her?" he replied.

"Harth, her stepson, can care for her. Why, I have heard nothing of these people for more than half my life and what I have heard was nothing good."

Guldviva's voice as she spoke, in spite of its intensity, was quiet. There was always a quietness about her.

The stranger's face was impassive. While Guldviva was speaking his small eyes darted here and there about the room. Nothing escaped them. When he spoke again it was evident that in his clumsy way he was trying to conciliate her.

"Your grandmother has indeed her stepson, Harth, but he does not do so much for her. He is some of the time away——"

"Yes," Guldviva nodded as she spoke. "I have heard how they do up there. He is away because he comes down and steals our cattle, our provender, our deer in the north of Sweden. I do not hold with the Lapps."

The stranger pushed back his heavy fur-tipped cap and wiped his forehead with a red handkerchief. He slouched forward, watching Guldviva as she went back and forth from the cupboard to a wooden table near the stove. She brought forth an earthenware plate of hard crisp gray bread, a jug of milk, and a slab of golden cheese.

"Eat, if you will, and warm yourself. Tell me, did you know my father?" she asked. She stood silently watching the man as he went over to the table and began to devour the food there. He nodded between bites.

"Yes, we came to this country in a fishing boat. We tried whale fishing together at Varlo but it was before the time of easy catching." He turned a little, looking over his shoulder at Guldviva, a chunk of bread and cheese halfway to his mouth. "What do you know of your father?" he asked.

Guldviva opened the stove door and a dancing red light touched the somber quiet of the room as she did so.

"I know only that he was idle, and that my mother regretted always that she married a Lapp. I was but two years old when he died and I do not remember him."

"Your mother, she has been gone some years?" asked Lari, wiping his lips with the back of his sleeve, and rising to his feet.

"Yes," she answered and her voice was gentle. There was a thrill of tenderness in its depths. "We

will not speak of my mother nor about myself. There is surely no one in that wild land from whence you come who cares to hear——”

“You are wrong,” Lari interrupted her. “Your kinsfolk there would wonder at so fine a house, such fine clothes, and food, too, of the best. Well, I see you are not badly off. You have a house—and money. It is well for you, but,” he came a step nearer as he went on speaking, “you are young to live alone with money. Should you not give it to the care of some wise person to guard for you? If it is much money a bank in the city could keep it for you.” He twisted his red muffler about his throat, moving slowly toward the door. Guldviva answered him quickly, without thinking:

“I can care for all I have, myself. I have no fear of robbers. We are of a different race, down here.”

Lari opened the door, bowing clumsily.

“Well, I was but giving a word of caution, as I once knew your father. One day I shall be sailing back to Varlo, and traveling is easy across the ice from there to the land of your kinsfolk. Maybe I will see you again and your heart will be softened to send a message there.” Without another word Lari shuffled outside and went slowly down the snowy path.

Guldviva stood still, looking after her strange visitor. Suddenly she frowned a little, catching her breath. She had been unwise. She had forgotten

the still calm of the woodland and had spoken without thinking. She had let Lari, the strange Lapp, know that she had money and that she kept it in her own house. She frowned, but the next minute she smiled as a faint sound reached her ears.

"Come, Sno Konung," she called softly. "Come." And suddenly and softly a great white cat ran down the wood path and, as Guldviva bent down toward it, sprang lightly to her shoulder. She held the cold, soft, purring animal close to her, swaying back and forth in the crisp silver air.

"Heigh-ho, Sno Konung. You do love the air and the stillness, the wood—ah, even the snow is not so miserable for you. Come, my pretty, and have your bread and milk. Come and tell me many things. We will weave dreams and fancies together in the dusk before I light the candle. We will forget all strangers who come from Lapland." And, holding the great white pet closely in her arms, she shut the house door against the gathering dark.

CHAPTER III

THE DESERTED CASTLE

"IT certainly is funny that Hjalmar hasn't met us," Stella faltered with a nervous catch in her voice. She sat down on her suitcase despairingly.

Audrey Bradford laughed at the quaver in her friend's voice. "What of it? Perhaps something happened to the cable. You know we didn't have time to get an answer. Wouldn't that be sport if we could surprise them? Just to arrive at the castle and walk in on Tante Greta when she didn't expect us!"

Audrey's laugh rang out clearly, mingling with the varied sounds of the Central Station at Stockholm. Some Russian travelers, men in heavy woolen coats and woolen caps, turned and watched the two girls curiously.

"You do look so owl-like sitting there, Stella. Think, isn't it wonderful! We're down here alone, just the two of us."

Stella looked up quickly, indignant words on her lips, but suddenly she smiled wanly. There stood her friend, gallantly smiling, in her wine-colored cloak with its high fur collar, her cheeks crimson,

her eyes dancing with excitement. After all there was no one like Audrey. There never had been. What a loyal, splendid friend! All the joy and color and interest that Stella had ever known had come through Audrey.

It had been Audrey's idea that she and Stella should come to Sweden to spend Christmas with her Tante Greta at the castle on the rocks. It had been born of her longing to see Sweden in midwinter and her desire to renew the friendships she had made two summers before. And then, what might such a trip not do for Stella, her dearest friend, a sweet, shy girl who was always a little ill at ease in the gay, laughing crowd of Audrey's brother and his friends. What a chance to take her adventuring!

Her suggestion had quite taken her father's breath away at first; it came so suddenly. He had spoken several times of sending Audrey over soon to cheer up her lonely aunt, but he had not been prepared for Audrey's request that she and Stella West, who was his ward as well as Audrey's chum, should start for Sweden immediately in order to arrive in time for the Christmas holidays. There had been a few days of indecision and much discussion of plans, and then Mr. Bradford had been called to Honolulu on a business trip which would take most of the winter months. That settled it. The girls should go immediately and he would come over for them in the spring.

Audrey's father had been able to book passage

for them on the same boat on which Audrey had crossed two summers before. The friendly captain said he would look out for the two girls. They cabled Tante Greta and were on their way almost before they knew what was happening to them.

Now that they were in Stockholm and old Hjalmar had not met them, Stella felt a little queer. She could not adjust herself as readily as Audrey. Besides, the trip had been a strenuous one for Stella, bitter cold and quite stormy. She heaved a sigh of relief to be on dry land again.

"Thank goodness we're here. I've often wondered this last week if we ever would arrive anywhere. That awful voyage. Well, let's find some coffee somewhere. Coffee and rolls! How heavenly that sounds. I suppose I'll be more enthusiastic after breakfast," Stella said.

Audrey laughed again, turning toward a stolid porter who stood waiting near them. She spoke some halting Swedish to him, but he understood that they wanted breakfast and led them to the crowded, brightly lighted dining room of the station.

Stella's spirits rose steadily as they partook of spicy coffee cake and fragrant coffee. An hour later they were seated in the compartment of a train, a white world of snow-covered pine trees outside. Their suitcases were at their feet, the steamer-rug holder on top.

"Why do you suppose the telephone has been discontinued?" Stella asked a little anxiously.

Audrey had tried to telephone the castle after breakfast and had been told there was no connection.

"Oh, it's Tante. She's so old-fashioned. You see Daddy insisted on their having a telephone. He persuaded them to have it put in before he left two years ago, and I know they certainly had one at the time of grandfather's death, but Tante is so odd, she probably thought it wasn't worth while. She just lives alone there with the servants. How we'll cheer her up. We'll have parties and all kinds of fun, and of course we'll go up to Stockholm and stay with the Zanders and think, Stella, this really is an adventure! We're on our way to the castle and it may not be too easy to reach it, you know. We may have to walk across the ice from the station." There was excitement in Audrey's voice as she spoke, and later on when they stood together in the bleak little country station, Stella, too, spoke excitedly.

"It is strange. The ice is so dark and the woods all along so quiet and mysterious."

"Yes, listen. Stella, we can walk across easily. We'll leave the suitcases with the deaf old station man and Hjalmar can see about bringing them across later. See the man skating. He's going right across. It will be easy for us," said Audrey.

Stella nodded, looking up at the rigid grayness of the castle across the bay. It loomed above them against a flat, fading gray sky.

"It almost frightens me, the castle. I know, of

course, we'll really find your nice, gentle aunt and good old Hjalmar there, yet it all looks so strange. Come on, Audrey." Stella held out her hand gayly and the two girls started across the narrow frozen waterway, their voices echoing along the icy ridges.

It was easy traveling; the ice was firm and roughened enough to make the footing fairly secure. Audrey caught Stella's arm when they were halfway across.

"Look, Stella," she cried. "Look off that way——"

Stella looked off in the direction in which Audrey pointed. Dark waterways curved easily in and out, shining banks of silver guarding them. The wind moaned softly. Now and then the ice creaked. A little way farther on they saw the faint glimmer of a wide, open bay.

"It is strange, far stranger than I had thought it would be," Stella said softly.

"It is Sweden," Audrey answered her.

They sank down on the bank when they reached the other side and then started to ascend the steep path leading upward toward the high, towering old house above them.

Audrey turned and spoke over her shoulder to Stella:

"I certainly know this pathway. Look out, it's mighty slippery. We used to race down here after early coffee for a plunge or a row up to the bay before breakfast. No lights yet in the library. How

grim the old place looks." She turned and gave a hand to her friend. "I'll boost you over this last steep bit. Now, let me see, we'll clang the front-door knocker and wait until we hear Hjalmar coming. Then we'll hide each side of the door and surprise him. I hope the shock will not give the old dear heart failure."

The knocker clanged loudly through the wintry twilight, but there were no answering voices, no footsteps. There was no sound anywhere about except an odd, far-away creaking.

"That sound we hear is a birch forest covered with ice. Nore told me about it. He said it was the strangest sound he had ever heard. There are almost no people anywhere about here in winter-time, but people do live there in the birch wood, a girl and her mother. Nore knew them. I'm knocking again. Stella, why don't they answer?"

There was no sound at all but the far creaking and the ghostly echo of the knocker through the great house.

"We must get in. I know where there's a window opening into a side hallway that I'm sure isn't locked. It's behind some shrubbery and there will be deep snow all around it, but never mind, we cannot stand here." Audrey caught Stella's hand and they ran down the icy steps and around the corner of the house.

"It's this window. No one ever thinks of it. The others are all double to keep out the cold."

Audrey tugged at a snow-covered window almost hidden by an icy bush. Stella came up beside her and after a moment of hard pushing, the window opened and they climbed inside, jumped down, and found themselves in a long dim hallway.

They stood for a moment close together in the dusky corridor. Silence seemed to shriek at them there in the grayness. They moved on until they came to a door at the far end. Audrey gave it a little push and it creaked on its hinges, opening slowly.

"It is queer, Stella. It's so still. Why, where can they be, the servants, Tante, everybody?" Audrey's voice echoed oddly. Stella grasped her arm.

"Listen, isn't that weird—your voice answering back? Audrey, this is an empty house. I am sure of it," Stella exclaimed.

Audrey nodded, listening.

"Why, where are they? Where can they be? Tante, where is she?" There was a little quiver at the end of Audrey's last words. She felt suddenly very tired and her legs trembled a little.

They walked on again, stopping involuntarily in front of the wide-open door leading to a great, white-shrouded room beyond.

"The drawing-room, how deserted it is; how ghostly," said Audrey. Then she lifted her voice and called, "Tante—Hjalmar—is there no one home? It is Audrey, Tante."

Silver voices laughed back at them tauntingly, echoes from a dozen deserted rooms and hallways. There was no doubt that the castle was deserted for the winter. Its chill dampness, its unused rooms spoke eloquently of this.

Audrey turned and found Stella, her eyes large with amazement, her face a little white in the fast deepening dusk. She smiled grimly and Stella smiled bravely back. Then she spoke quickly:

"We must find matches and a candle right away. There were always myriads of them about on tables and mantelpieces. We must have light and then find wood and build a fire in the stove in the little morning room. Come, we mustn't waste time." She turned and ran down the hall to the left. Stella followed her, calling breathlessly:

"Wait, Audrey, for Pete's sake, wait! I'm terrified."

Audrey laughed back over her shoulder, slowing up a little.

There were no matches on the mantelpiece in the icy, orderly sitting room, and the two girls ran upstairs.

"Tante's room is here at the right," Audrey said softly as they passed before a closed door at the top of the stairs.

Audrey opened the door and they went inside. Silence again and great cold. There was a blue blanket neatly folded at the foot of the bed. The curtains at the windows had been removed and white-

ness outside glowed through fast-gathering darkness. Audrey ran across the room, her relieved voice calling back a moment later from the table beside the bed:

"Here are matches and a candle, a good, fat tall one in a silver holder. Now to forage for wood!"

"And food," put in Stella, smiling again as Audrey came back across the room with the candle and matches.

They found wood and kindlings in an iron box beside the great white gleaming kakelugn in the small sitting room and, after a search, some papers in a wastebasket. At last they succeeded in starting a fire. Then they drew a small sofa close up to it and sat down.

Stella's hands were cold and Audrey rubbed them vigorously, her conscience troubling her the while. Stella was a frail-looking girl. She did not adjust herself easily to the unexpected. Yet after all, she, Audrey, had never once dreamed of not finding Tante and Hjalmar and the servants at the castle. Where were they? Where could they be?

It was lonely, with a wild, sinister loneliness. They had had no food since breakfast. There would surely be stores of some kind in the cellar, potatoes and onions, but the great house seemed suddenly ponderous, overwhelming, unfriendly.

"Stella, I've an idea, a sudden plan. I'll tell you what I think we had better do when you've rested. Those people I spoke about, the ones who live in

the birch wood—well, they're always here in winter, Nore said. They were away selling their tapestry weavings when we were here two years ago, but in winter they are always here. Let's go to them and ask for shelter. The girl has an odd name. I cannot think what it is. She is a strange girl who talks to animals." Audrey sprang up. "That is a good plan, I'm sure. They will give us food and shelter and they will tell us why the castle is empty."

Stella jumped to her feet. "Yes, do let's go. Anything but this. I'm terrified. We two here all alone at night in this deserted castle in the country in Sweden. It's an adventure sure enough, Audrey." She put both arms suddenly and impulsively about her companion as she spoke. "I'm glad you chose me to share it with you, Audrey. I feel as though I were living for the first time. I'm glad I'm here. Oh, so glad."

Audrey gave Stella an answering hug.

"You're a real sport, Stella. I'd rather have you than Sven or Hoodie or any of the rest of the crowd. What if they could see us now! Come on. Put your collar way up around your face. I know the way up the birch wood and I've seen the funny little house in the center of it."

She talked on excitedly as they ran quickly down the broad stairs, along the hall, through the door at the end of the dim gray corridor. They climbed out of the window and walked, knee-deep in snow, around to the far side of the castle, and hand in

hand, cautiously, they descended the path to the road below, walking swiftly along its slippery surface. It had been worn smooth in the center by sledge runners and Audrey glanced back at it ruefully as they turned into a wood path.

"I know the way along here pretty well, and it's moonlight and the woods are bare, so it won't be so hard to find our way to the little house."

They made their slow way through the silver wood ways, the faint moonlight touching to iridescence the white branches of the trees.

Stella felt as though she were walking in a dream. This moonlit forest of ice—this strange country—this not knowing where one was going or what awaited one.

Audrey called out suddenly:

"There is the house. I see a light."

They came up to the house noiselessly, and Audrey knocked on the broad, icy door. It was opened instantly. Guldviva stood there looking out at them, holding her great white cat close in her arms.

Audrey stretched out her hands impulsively as though to draw some of the warmth and cheer of the little room to her and Stella.

"Please let us in. We are cold and hungry. What a wonderful cat!" she exclaimed.

Guldviva smiled, standing aside and nodding toward the candlelit room.

"Sno Konung and I welcome you," she answered.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE BIRCH FOREST

CANDLELIGHT and a warm glow from the great stove greeted them as Guldviva closed the door after them. The front of the kakelugn was open and a crimson glow welcomed them. Sno Konung bounded from his mistress's shoulder and curled up in his favorite corner near the stove, watching intently the new arrivals, his ears pricked questioningly.

Audrey spoke first in English rapidly, then laughed suddenly and began again slowly, haltingly, in Swedish:

"I'm Audrey Bradford and this is my friend, Stella West. I'm the Countess Essen's niece and I stayed at the castle two years ago with my brother. Stella and I have come from the States to visit my aunt. We cabled her at the last minute and we arrived to find the castle—empty!" Audrey spread out her hands in such a foreign way that Stella and Guldviva both laughed. The ice was broken at once and there was from that moment a bond of comradeship among the three girls.

Guldviva drew two stools close to the kakelugn.

"Come, you will please sit down close to the fire.

Come quickly, Froknar, you are so cold and hungry. Yes, I am sure of that." She helped them remove their cloaks and then after they sat down she put some more birch logs on the fire and shut the little white door of the kakelugn. Then she stood for a moment gazing at Audrey.

"You came, the two of you, alone, from America? That is strange, to come so far in midwinter. It is a great adventure!" she said softly.

Audrey answered eagerly, smiling her pleasure at the other's words.

"Yes, yes, an adventure, that is what it is, and it is growing more and more exciting all the time. The grand old cold house! You can't know how thrilling it was roaming through it in the darkness!"

Stella interrupted with a laugh and a groan and then they all laughed together.

Then Audrey leaned forward eagerly, her cheeks crimson from the cold and the sudden heat from the stove.

"Where are they—my aunt and the old Hjalmar and the other servants? What does it mean, do you know? Why is the castle closed up?" There was excitement and a little of dread in her voice as she spoke.

Guldviva answered quickly:

"All is well. There is no real cause for sorrow that the castle is closed. It has been too cold and, since the old count died, too lonely for your aunt. Her rheumatism was so bad in November that the

few friends who visited her begged her to leave. She has gone to the south of Sweden to a sanitarium for the winter. Old Hjalmar boards with a fisherman. He, too, is poorly, but although he is lame he is sturdy and many a winter's day he stops by here with a cheery word, to see that all is well with me."

While she was speaking Guldviva went back and forth from the cupboard in a far corner of the room to the table near the stove, exchanging the dark table cover for a red and white cloth and bringing out cheese and bread and butter from within.

Audrey and Stella felt suddenly a little flat. It had all seemed so mysterious and thrilling and the explanation was so simple and tame.

"Poor Tante. If only we had come earlier, she would never have left the castle. I am sure we could have warmed and cheered her. Well, let me see, Stella. What had we better do—go to Stockholm? Of course my friends are there, the Zanders and the Carlsons."

She looked up at Guldviva, who had not understood her words, then to Stella, and smiling a little wanly, said:

"I was telling my friend that, of course, we must go to Stockholm. I have friends there, the Zanders. They spend their summers not far from here, so perhaps you know them. We were together, all of us, two years ago. Such glorious times we had at Sunhem, their home—Sven and Bjorn and Valfried and I."

Guldviva shook her head gravely.

"I have seen them, the Zanders, but I do not know them. In the summers I am busy always and so much away. Mother and I used to travel about selling the rugs and shawls." Then Guldviva came close to Audrey, speaking in spite of her calm way with great earnestness.

"Please me by not speaking of leaving me just as you have come, Froken. Surely you will be happier, both of you, in the gay city, but for to-night and as long as you will stay here, it is my joy to have you."

Something in Guldviva's simple words, a wistfulness combined with the touch of mystery there seemed to be about her, made a sudden and great appeal to both girls. Stella jumped up and laid her hand on Guldviva's arm, speaking impulsively:

"You are asking us to stay. I know you are. I couldn't really understand, but I am sure of it."

Guldviva nodded.

"Yes, to stay," she answered simply. "These are a few of your words I understand. Nore taught me them." As she spoke a slight shadow touched Guldviva's face. The white cat leaped suddenly and noiselessly to her shoulder and she rested her dark head lovingly against the gleaming fur.

It was to Guldviva the strangest thing which had ever happened to her, their sudden coming. It was stranger than the visit of Lari the Lapp the week before. That visit had brought a momentary dark-

ness, but a brightness, a vague promise of new ways, new days, seemed to come with this one.

Audrey, too, sprang to her feet, her eyes shining.

"You know them all, of course, the Carlsons. I have heard them speak of you; Marta and Karl and little Thure, and Nore, too, told me of Guldviva who lives in the woods. He told me of how you love all animals and of how they have no fear of you."

Audrey was impulsive but seldom affectionate, yet she put her arm around Guldviva and for a moment the three stood there, close together in the softly lit room, Sno Konung regarding them curiously from his mistress's shoulder.

Guldviva answered Audrey in her simple way:

"I have not known many people in my life, but I have known many animals." Then, suddenly, as though a realization had come to her, she looked earnestly at Audrey.

"I, too, have heard much of you, Froken, and of the summer two years ago when it came about that you helped to discover that Nore Carlson was in reality—Nore Essen."

Her voice dropped to a whisper as she spoke the last words and she turned away with a little gesture of courtesy, saying:

"I must make coffee for you both at once. People are not really at home or welcomed in Sweden until they have all drunk coffee together."

They made a merry meal, the three of them, Sno

Konung watching earnestly for stray bits of bread and cheese. Guldviva sat a little aside, eating only a slice of bread and butter. She was quietly eager to know that her guests had all that they desired. How she wished for fresh eggs so that she could make them an omelet. There was only the hard bread, delicious cheese, and some of the confiture which she had made early in the autumn from the little bright red lingon berries, wonderful coffee, and gray bowls of left-over soup which she had reheated.

Her guests seemed to enjoy their simple fare, and as Guldviva sat watching them, the wonder of their coming burst over her anew—a little over an hour ago she had been alone as she had been so much of the time since her mother had left her, two years before. Alone, except for Sno Konung, busy with her weaving, rejoicing always in the silver forest surrounding her. Then there had come, suddenly, from so far away, girls of her own age, so vastly different—so different! Audrey Bradford, joyous, excited, assured; Stella, slight, quiet, gentle, delicate. Audrey in a tan sport dress and rose scarf; Stella in dark blue, the simplest kind of dress but so finely fashioned, so of the world!

The world! These two were a part of it, the great world beyond the seas. Guldviva sat quietly as always, her hands folded lightly in her lap. The glow from the stove touched her white face with its high cheek bones, its low, dark brows. It touched faintly to red the dark braids bound about her head.

Years later all three of them, each in her different way, remembered that evening there in the kindly warmth, the candle glow. It was to Audrey a triumphant memory of something accomplished which she had set out to achieve, an adventure brought, if not to an exultant finish, at least to a delightful halfway house. It was to Stella more nearly the memory of a dream than to any of the others, bewildering, meaningful.

A month ago there had been that feeling with Stella that always and forever things would go along in the same colorless way. There had been loneliness of spirit and, as she sat there in the quiet room of the house in the birch wood, she knew that there had been heartache too.

The change was overwhelming. She shuddered as she thought of the boat, the wild night, the creaking sounds, the early morning deck washings that always sounded like the launching of lifeboats, the strange sounds and smells and food. Their arrival alone. Stockholm, droskas, the strange purple midday light over the city. The castle, so deserted, so forbidding, withal so fascinating. Finally the icy forest, this strange little house, and, above all, this girl Guldviva, so different, so strange. Stella put her head back against the wall and shut her eyes. She would have drifted into sleep in another moment if Guldviva had not gone suddenly and swiftly to the window.

"Some one is coming," she said.

A moment later there was a knock and a quick opening of the heavy door, accompanied by a loud stamping of feet. Audrey sprang up.

"It's Hjalmar—Hjalmar—I'm glad, glad, glad! I've come all the way from America to see you!"

The newcomer stood motionless, a broad, towering figure bent over a little by age. He blinked rapidly, pulled off his blue woolen cap, and stood, blinking again. Then he gave a wheezing sort of exclamation which sounded like "Oi yoi oi!"

Audrey laughed excitedly, ran up to him, and put her arms around him.

"You are surprised, Hjalmar! At last I have surprised some one. This is worth it all. I'm not a ghost. Pinch me!"

Hjalmar lifted both hands.

"Oi yoi oi!" he exclaimed again. Then suddenly a slow smile wreathed his weather-beaten, wrinkled face. He slapped his knee, and burst out laughing.

"I might have known you would be up to some tricks, Froken Audrey. There's no one like you—no one! How you came and why I can't say, but here you seem to be." Hjalmar laughed again, but, curiosity getting the better of him, he said:

"Tell me, little Froken, how you came and why?" Hjalmar began slowly to unfasten the collar of his cloak. He stood there, the ice dripping from his beard, his usually placid face beaming.

So Audrey explained, and they sat about the stove for an hour or more, laughing and chatting.

Hjalmar delivered several slow welcoming speeches in labored English to Stella. He felt greatly the responsibility of it all, but he could not help being delighted to welcome again the little Froken Audrey, grown two years older, who had so delighted them all at the castle on the rocks.

When he left them he told Audrey gravely that he would arrange for them to stay with his sister in Stockholm. Audrey was not greatly pleased with the plan, but agreed to it for the moment and Hjalmar left them to plod back to his fisherman lodgings through the snow, the three girls and Sno Konung watching him from the lighted doorway.

CHAPTER V

OLD FRIENDS MEET

"LILLEMORE is such a bore! I won't tolerate her any longer, great, fat, plum-faced thing!"

Valfried Zander was so angry that she stepped in front of a droska without seeing it, and her brother Bjorn jerked her back on the curbing just in time.

"Val Zander, you ought to be ashamed. How dare you speak that way about good old Lillemore. You're the most ungrateful——"

Valfried interrupted her brother's reproaches:

"There's an empty droska, Bjorn. Hurry, signal to him! There, he's coming. It's too cold to stand here. Let us go to a konditori for chocolate." Valfried jumped into the closed droska and Bjorn followed her, directing the driver to a konditori, and slamming the door after them as he sat back beside his sister. Bjorn's red, usually good-natured face was clouded with anger and he went on speaking indignantly as they made slow progress across the bridge at the end of the square, the great palace towering above them.

"You seem to forget the days and nights she took care of you when you had scarlatina not so very many years ago. It was all Lillemore then. No one else was anything. You wouldn't have her out of your sight. She used to sing lullabies to you half the night. Plum-faced! Well, you're a nice girl, I must say."

Bjorn looked so red and cross and childish in contrast to his neat, dignified, naval-school uniform, that Valfried laughed in spite of herself. She was tall and pretty and looked much older than the Valfried of two years before who had been Audrey Bradford's friend and playmate in and about the castle on the rocks. The Zanders' summer home, Sunhem, was not far from the castle, and the Zander children and Audrey and Sven had been friends at once on the arrival of the latter from America.

"Be silent, Bjorn. You take everything I say so seriously. Of course Lillemore is all right in her way, but she's just a meddlesome old thing, always wanting to know where I'm going and what I've been doing and whom my letters are from and what I'm going to wear. Himmel! Between her and Mother I shall be driven simply wild!"

"Oh, it's Mother now, is it?" jeered Bjorn; "go on, run down Mother——"

"Bjorn, you act like a schoolmistress. It's all very well for you and your naval school. Free to do as you like——"

Bjorn interrupted, with a sarcastic laugh:

"Free to do as I like. Well, that's funny. This is the first free afternoon I have had in weeks and don't we have to be back at school at an early hour every evening, and——"

"Yes, yes, I know, but you don't everlastingly have some one at your heels. My family are simply appalling. Other girls do as they like. Look at Ingeborg Wicander, she does exactly——"

Valfried's words seemed frozen on her lips. She leaned out of the droska window, too astonished apparently for the moment to speak. Then she pounded on the side of the droska, shrieking at the driver, a sleepy-looking individual:

"Stop at once! Stop, please." Then she looked over her shoulder at Bjorn. "There's some one there at the corner. Yes, it is, Bjorn, look, quick! It's Audrey Bradford."

Valfried jumped out of the droska and the next moment, there on a crowded corner of Strandvagen, she and Audrey hugged one another ecstatically, both talking, explaining, laughing at the same time. A moment later Bjorn joined them and there were more explanations and exclamations. Audrey had only a chance to put in a word now and then to the effect that she and her friend had come over quite unexpectedly and that they were staying with Hjalmar's sister.

Valfried's excited laugh rang out on the clear, early afternoon air.

"Hjalmar's sister—no—it is too absolutely amus-

ing. You are here, really here, my Audrey. It is indeed too wonderful to be true." Valfried shook both Audrey's warm gloved hands as she spoke, turning with her toward the waiting droska, Bjorn beaming his welcome as he paid the driver.

"We'll not stop to talk another minute here in the cold. We'll go in here at once and simply devour each other with questions while we have some chocolate. Find a table, Bjorn. I cannot take my eyes off my dear friend who has come so far to see me." Valfried, always excitable, was fairly trembling with delight and went on speaking as fast as she could after they were seated at a neat green table in a corner of the big konditori.

"I was only just telling Bjorn how stupid and horrible everything is, or rather was. I was fed up with the same old girls, the same old cadets, who have to rush off to school just when we are having the most fun, Mother's fussing and stupid old plum—" A frowning glance from Bjorn made her laugh as she threw off her fox fur and turned toward Audrey.

"I was going to say plum-faced Lillemore, but Bjorn won't let me. Now you talk, Audrey. We'll both be absolutely silent and listen until the chocolate comes."

Audrey was excited, too, and quite ready to tell her adventures so far as they went. She began way back in New York, explaining first that Stella had stayed in to rest at Hjalmar's sister's flat and that

she herself had run out for a sight of winter in Stockholm and that they had both of them come up from the country that morning. She told them how she had longed for a sight of Sweden in midwinter; how she and Stella had persuaded her father to let them come; how they had come; how their cable message had never been delivered because Tante Greta had gone south; and how they, the two of them, across the wintry Atlantic, had actually arrived without any one in Sweden knowing that they were coming.

Valfried broke in at this point with laughter and the exclamation, "Audrey, isn't that just like you, the way you adore doing things! What did you do—go way out to the castle on the rocks and find it empty?"

A smiling maid arrived with a tray on which were three cups of chocolate, topped with whipped cream, and a large plate of delicious-looking cake.

"We may eat as many as we like and keep count. Do you remember how you used to like to go to the counter and choose them, Audrey? You may do that another time, but now tell us everything. Don't speak for a moment, Bjorn. Let Audrey talk!" Valfried took a large bite of a sumptuous cream éclair and gazed rapturously at Audrey.

"Yes, we crawled in a window and wandered about and it was creepier than all the graveyards in the universe. Then I suddenly thought of the little house in the birch wood, how we had come

upon it once in the summer two years ago, and though it was empty then, I remembered the Carlsons told me that a girl named Guldviva lived there with her mother."

Bjorn put both elbows on the table, leaning forward.

"Did you go there, Audrey, late in the afternoon, like that, you two girls, the first day you arrived from America? Did you see this girl Guldviva?"

There was a note of eagerness in Bjorn's usually placid voice. He and Valfried listened as Audrey told of their welcome by Guldviva, of the little supper by the hot kakelugn, of Sno Konung and, last, of the arrival of Hjalmar.

"We stayed two days with Guldviva. Stella and I slept in a queer bed built right in the wall. The forest is like a fairy forest and Guldviva herself seems like a fairy. Hjalmar came over every day. We had wonderful times, the four of us. Guldviva is rather silent, but so different from any one I know."

Audrey was interrupted by Valfried who broke in impatiently:

"That is all very well and just like you, to find that odd girl in the woods. I've seen her often selling birch baskets at the boat landings. She does beautiful weaving, Mother says, but Audrey, Audrey, it's Stockholm now, almost midwinter, almost Christmas. There are such myriads of things to do and talk over. First of all, Mother

must know that you are here and you and Stella must come to us!"

There was no use in arguing with Valfried when she had an idea and a plan. Audrey knew this from her past experiences. She knew, too, that the Zanders were the most hospitable people in the world, and that Fru Zander never objected to visitors. It was very dull and stupid at Hjalmar's sister's flat and the temptation to visit Valfried, if invited by Fru Zander, was very great.

"Hjalmar won't approve," Audrey protested, as they waited for a droska in front of the konditori.

"Nonsense! Old family servants are the most utterly trying people in the world. They want to manage the universe. You haven't traveled all this way just to be cooped up in a dingy little flat over in Ridderholm." As she spoke Valfried gave her friend a hug.

"Now that I've found you I don't propose to let you out of my sight." Valfried blushed and bowed formally to a group of cadets who passed by them. They in turn saluted stiffly, their eyes straight in front of them, but their lips smiling.

"Brother cadets of Bjorn's. Nice boys. They have to be dignified like that on the street," Valfried explained to Audrey. They got into a droska which Bjorn had signaled.

"We'll drive straight up Strandvagen and see Mother and then go for Stella and your baggage,"

Valfried said and there was a determination about her which made Audrey and Bjorn laugh.

"It will be heavenly, of course, to be with you for a few days. I've a plan for later on and it includes us all. Are you sure your mother won't mind? Stella will be thrilled. Hjalmar's sister is so deaf and quiet. She expects a permanent lodger next week," Audrey said excitedly.

The next few hours were busy ones, for Fru Zander insisted on the girls coming to her at once. She wrote a letter to Tante Greta and to Hjalmar and by noon the next day Audrey and Stella and their trunks and bags were one and all safely deposited in the big double Strandvagen flat.

"Oh, joy, the curving red staircase. I've seen it in my dreams. See, Stella, here it is. I've often told you about it!" Audrey gave Stella a hug and she returned it ecstatically.

"Audrey, it has all been thrilling, of course, Guldviva's hut and even Hjalmar's sister's flat. But this is different. This is glorious, being here with the fascinating Zander family, all of us together and the wonderful sights from the windows." They had walked over to the wide window in the hallway while Stella was speaking and stood together, gazing off at the breath-taking beauty of the scene below. It was after two o'clock in the afternoon and the sun was sinking fast. There was the strange amethyst light over the city so peculiar to Stockholm in winter. The frozen strand reaching across to

one of the city islands and the far silver windings of frozen waterways in the distance glistened with fast-fading crimson and mauve. Grim black warships were outlined against a rainbow sky.

Valfried ran down the twisted red staircase and then up again.

"Your room really does look cozy. Lillemore is so delighted you have come. She really is an old dear in a way. She wants to talk to you, Audrey. She wants to reminisce about the time you were all here for midsummer and Astrid was lost."

Audrey answered a little gravely, looking off at the silver and violet of the night:

"It was all very wonderful, really, that time, Val. Just think of it, Stella, Nore's Uncle Eugene, who had a studio in Ridderholm then, found Astrid, and this was one of the threads that began to unravel the mystery of Nore until we found him to be not only Eugene's nephew, but one of ourselves—an Essen."

That evening the three girls stood again by the window. Before the jolly four o'clock dinner they had had a long sleigh ride in Djurgården, a great park near the city. Valfried was full of plans for the next day, shopping, a matinée at the Royal Opera, chocolate afterward.

Stella responded a little absently for a moment. Audrey touched her arm.

"I am thinking of Guldviva, Audrey. That was Sweden, there in the house in the birch wood and

this is Sweden, too. Isn't it strange how different lives can be?"

Audrey nodded and then they both turned smilingly toward Valfried as she sank down on the window seat beside them.

"Saturday night we're all going coasting at Iddrottsparken," she said. She looked bright and gracious in her soft blue frock, smiling up at them.

"Tell me, Audrey," she went on, leaning sideways against the cushions, "don't you wonder about Nore? Don't you suppose he has changed a great deal? You see I only knew him as a fisher boy. I mean I really didn't know him at all. You always thought him so delightful. What can he be like now, after two years of travel and study? Some one said that he was the youngest artist who has ever been mentioned in Paris. He must be very different now."

Audrey smiled a little uncertainly, but it was Stella who spoke:

"I would rather meet him than any one. I think he must be the most mysterious boy in the world."

Valfried gave a little shrug. She wanted to know Nore Essen as she never had wanted to know a boy before, but she would not have admitted it for anything. Suddenly she leaned forward, peering out into the black and silver of the moonlit city and stretching out her arm toward the distant grayness of the royal palace and the faint white outline of the

bridge which led from it, the old island of Ridderholm, to the newer part of the city.

"Quick, do you see that light there by the palace? Watch it. See it flare out across the bridges. See, it has reached Gustaf Adolph's Torg. Do you know what it is? Well, it is the advance guard of the king. He is going to the opera, and his escort is carrying torches in front of him."

Audrey and Stella had followed the crimson flare breathlessly with their eyes. Then Stella went up with Valfried to the room prepared for the two newcomers. Audrey stood still, looking out into the night. There was a gravity about her face as she stood there in the deepening gloom of the hallway, the dark, strange city with its girdle of sea stretching out before her. She was thinking of what Valfried had said about Nore and she found that she was suddenly realizing many things that in her heedless way she had overlooked. She had always thought of Nore just as the boy she had known, sailing alone on the fjords, fishing, talking shyly; the Nore, too, dressed as in the picture in the tower, a Nore found suddenly to be an Essen, yet turning with loyalty to the fisher folk he called his own.

She seemed suddenly a part of the whole thrilling time two years ago. A great longing came over her to see again the Nore who was her cousin, her own flesh and blood, and who had been the first of her friends.

CHAPTER VI

"SWEDEN CALLS ME"

"THIS square is so gray. It is beautiful at dusk or in the moonlight, but now, just after déjeuner, it is dull, just the grim-looking houses and the newspaper kiosk." Nore stood with both hands on the window sill, speaking to Domski over his shoulder.

"It is because you are of the North that you feel this. I, who am Russian, feel it, too. I would see the smoke rise from a samovar. I would hear the bells of a droska sleigh." Domski spoke moodily. He was tired of the bleak studio at Montparnasse, tired of paint and easel, and of making omelets.

Nore turned facing Domski, a hint of excitement in his voice.

"You feel that way, too, do you? The North is calling you as it calls to me. It is only six days to Christmas. Tell me, what money have we? Look in your green stocking and see!"

Domski hobbled over to a chest of drawers and brought forth a much worn olive-green stocking. Then he sat down cross-legged in front of the fire and laboriously counted the crisp, fluttering notes.

"There is a great deal of money, Nore, a very

great deal. There is our three thousand francs. I knew, of course, how much there was before I counted. See, they are in bills of five hundred francs each. Then there is vegetable and egg money for a fortnight to come, in the kitchen drawer. That would be as much as one hundred francs." Domski looked up, bright-eyed, expectant, wondering what project would be suggested.

Nore stood frowning a little, thinking.

"Let me see," he said slowly. "One of those thousand francs I earned by copying the frescoes for the lady who is a friend of Uncle Eugene. One of the others is for the sight drawing class after Christmas. I do not need that class. I have found at the École Colarossi that I can do sight drawing almost free—for a mere song. The other thousand is for food. The rent is paid for December. We can also use the egg and vegetable money. Uncle Eugene writes he is to spend Christmas by the Black Sea. *Très bien*, Domski, tell me, do you not think we could go north to Stockholm?"

Domski considered the question thoughtfully. Then he nodded.

"We could do so. Yes, that we could. We shall go north for Christmas." He was on his feet a moment later ready to discuss ways and means, to pack and plan. He watched Nore eagerly as the latter stood handling some drawings on a table near the fire. Nore looked up and smiled a little wistfully. He was not used to doing things impulsively.

All his life until the last two years he had done the things he had to do, his desires and dreams had unconsciously been put aside, but the artist in him was waking to great life. It had always been there as he had fished and spread his nets on the sands to dry, as he had gone through ice and snow to the gray schoolhouse in winter. Now it was becoming more definite. He was seventeen. He had seen the works of great masters. He had imbibed some of the half-sad, half-careless atmosphere of his part of Paris. His heart had leaped with a wild, joyful enthusiasm at the few brief words of praise of a great painter who had seen some of his sketches. Dreams, vaguely formed, unrealized, began to unfold.

"Domski," he said, "I would bridge time. Do you understand? I see them in my dreams—pictures. I would like to leap as we leap on skis—across time, past these days of drudgery."

Domski nodded and crossed the room to replace the green stocking. He was used to artists and their ways and he thought a great deal himself always as he went about his tasks. He had thoughts and ideas of his own and he was not at all bashful about expressing them.

"Some day you will be great, Nore, a greater artist than Master Eugene. I know about these things," he answered Nore.

Nore leaned forward, his hands on the sketches strewn about the table, watching Domski as he took

a head of lettuce and some watercress and rubbed a bit of garlic on each. Nore realized suddenly with a touch of gratitude and affection what an unusual companion Domski was. He had just taken him for granted, along with his studies and gray old Paris. Their life had gone on from day to day. He worked at the studio and then came home to a hot supper prepared by Domski. Then the two of them, perhaps, would stroll about the gray, muddy streets. Domski was always there, always ready!

"We'll go together, you and I, Domski. We'll surprise them, Mother and Marta and Karl and little Thure. We'll go to-morrow. It will be a real Christmas for us all," Nore exclaimed, and his white, rather cold face lighted suddenly in the odd way it had of doing. "Mother wrote that the room where she keeps her weaving was warmed by the **kakelugn in the living room**. I can buy two cots and you and I can sleep in there. We will be with them for Christmas."

The next day was a busy one as the two boys stowed away their belongings in the one big valise they were to share between them.

"I'm taking these paints that I bought at the little shop in the Rue de la Grande Chaumière. They are the best colors in the world. Do you know, Domski, I have an odd idea that I'm going to paint something worth while—something of beauty while I'm home for Christmas—something that is not crude and full of youth and faults. I have done nothing so far

that is of value. Do you not imagine the look on Mother's face, Domski, if I should paint something that will live?"

Nore spoke so earnestly and was so unconscious of a black smudge across his nose and forehead, that Domski chuckled as he pushed a pair of woolen stockings inside his extra pair of shoes and wrapped the whole in newspaper.

"Your face is all black and white like a pierrot. Yes, when you paint a great picture we shall all rejoice, your cousin, Froken Audrey in America, and her good but not so brilliant brother, Sven." Domski hesitated and went on a little timidly:

"Tell me, Nore, is it only of your Carlson family that you think? Do you not feel at all that the castle on the rocks is—home?"

There was a moment of silence after Domski's question. When Nore answered he spoke perplexedly, looking up from the ungainly, overcrowded bag into which he was cramming an unwieldy pair of skates, wrapped in newspaper.

"They are my own people," he said slowly, "not by blood but by something deeper. The castle on the rocks is like a picture, so gray and towering. It always seemed like that to me, when I was Nore Carlson and used to sail by it in my fishing boat. My grandfather only lived two months after it was discovered who I was. You know that, Domski, and you know I never lived in the castle before I came away with Uncle Eugene to study. My aunt is gentle and kind and sad. I think often of her.

I am glad she is happy with friends in southern Sweden until the spring months come. The castle on the rocks cannot be home to me. I was never wanted there."

Nore slammed down the top of the heavy bag, leaning his weight full upon it while Domski locked it with a rusty key.

"The key and the money I shall place in my leather wallet, the one Master Eugene gave me when he had finished with it," he said importantly. He still looked a little curiously at Nore.

"You should not say that you are not wanted in the castle on the rocks, Nore. Master Eugene says that when they knew absolutely that you were Rudolph Essen's son the old count sobbed and Countess Greta nearly fainted with joy."

Nore smiled, lifting the bag and walking with it over to the door. He threw it down and then stretched out his arms, yawning.

"When Knut Carlson brought me as a baby in his fishing boat from Russia, he would have taken me to the castle and told them who I was—would have given me to them if he had not known they would not want me, because they had quarreled with my father for marrying a Russian. You see, Domski, it is as Nore Carlson I have thought and lived all these years. The castle is—alien—" Nore made a little gesture of finality and Domski knew that he was not to say any more.

They had no time for talking the rest of the afternoon. Nore ran out twice to a near-by shop

for things he had forgotten, and after a hasty meal of bread and cold sausage, he and Domski put on their coats and caps and went out together into the foggy dimness of the old square, crossed it, and after traversing several dingy streets that seemed to be playing hide and seek with each other, found themselves in the midst of the crowds of excited Christmas shoppers on the Boulevard Raspail. They were leaving in the morning for this surprise visit to the North, and they were, each in his own way, excited and happy. Neither of them had been back to Sweden since they had left with Nore's uncle, Eugene Kamanoff, two years before.

Nore had been a little surprised when Domski had announced gravely at supper that he had some Christmas shopping to do. He seemed so alone, except for Nore and his uncle, so utterly without any ties or kinsfolk, and his odd appearance, his roaming life had kept him from having any kind of settled acquaintanceships.

"We'll go out together, then, if you like," Nore had said. "I've a few things left to do and we can see the people enjoying themselves." He would not for the world have told independent Domski that he did not like to think of him alone in the midst of the jostling crowds.

"They are strange, these people, many of them, are they not, Nore?" Domski asked as they zig-zagged through the crowds.

Old women selling mistletoe hailed them with

high cackling voices. Vendors of bright-colored toys called to them. The hum of many voices and of every one talking at once was all around them.

When they returned to the studio, Domski regarded his purchases a little ruefully.

"The queer velvet heart for your kind mother is not as handsome as I would wish," he said to Nore.

"The blue scarf for Marta is just what she will like most. You are generous indeed to remember them, Domski," Nore answered. He unfastened the paper covering of a package of his own and stood looking down at it for a moment in silence. Domski had gone on into the room beyond with his bundles which he was going to carry in a string bag on the journey the next day. The room was quiet and firelight touched the heap of shimmering scarlet silk in the midst of its white paper covering.

Nore had been thinking all day of Guldviva, the strange, shy girl who had lived always in the birch wood with her mother. He knew that her mother had died since he had left Sweden and that she lived on alone in the little house in the heart of the forest. Like her he had been much alone all his life, with long hours of quiet fishing and thinking. Like her he loved animals and the silent mysteries of woodland and sea. They had not known each other well. They had both been shy, hard-working, reticent in those days when he had been the oldest boy in the fishing hut opposite the castle on the rocks. He remembered, as he stood there in the smoky studio,

the few talks they had had together, walking home from the rough little schoolhouse through snow and darkness.

"I have learned to read and write. I can learn now about things—countries far away, music, perhaps about pictures—" He remembered a quaint song she had sung once at sunset as the snow turned scarlet before his eyes. He had asked her for the words and had always remembered them:

Know this, if thou hast
A friend whom thou trusteth well,
Go often and see him,
For with brushwood
And with high grass
Will overgrow
The road on which no one walks.

Suddenly as he stood there, the thought of the shy girl whom he really hardly knew at all became fixed and vivid. He had thought of her before that day in the midst of the Paris crowds. The flash of scarlet silk in a shop window had brought her to his mind. It had been in a scarlet setting that he had known her. An impulse to take some gift to the lonely girl had come to him and he had obeyed it.

The journey of the two boys the next day was uneventful and uncomfortable, but they did not mind it. Neither the crowded trains nor the wild crossing from Germany to Sweden bothered them. A steel gray and white and silver morning found them in Stockholm, both touched with before-Christmas

excitement, both sure of a welcome in the great old city, both eager for the holiday time.

"Some of the ferries are running, the one from the museum across to Ridderholm is sure to be going back and forth. Do you mind taking a street car around the harbor, Domski? I'll carry the bag. I want to see the old part of town and the palace against the silvery sky—the sweep of the bridge, the floating ice. We can take the boat across to Ridderholm and it is only a little way from the landing to Mother's flat." Nore lifted the heavy bag. He and Domski stood outside the Central Station in Stockholm, in the cold northern sunlight.

They journeyed around to the ferry station near the stately gray museum and then boarded the boat, standing outside on the little, crowded deck. The still, icy air welcomed them. Nore looked off in delight at the silver-white waterways, the floating ice, the sweeping bridges. It was enchanting to him, this coming home to Sweden in the heart of the winter.

"We're really here, Domski, and what a welcome we'll have. Mother has not seen me for two years and she does not expect to see me until spring." He turned a little, and noticed some one staring at them, a strange-looking man in the dress of a Lapp. He stared first at Nore standing there tall and fair in his smart gray coat, and then past him to the short figure and dark face of Domski. It was the Lapp,

Lari, who had visited Guldviva in the little house in the birch wood.

"Did you notice that Lapp, Domski? He stared at us. Such an odd-looking man. His face held secrets," Nore said as they made their way up the great gray steps below the palace, turning off to the little street near by, where Fru Carlson and her children were living.

"Yes, secrets and plans. His face says that he has a plan and that it is not a good one," Domski answered as they turned into a dark arched doorway and slowly mounted a steep flight of gray stairs.

"It is the first flat on the left. I will ring the bell. It will be a wonderful surprise if Mother is at home. She is almost sure to be here, busy with her weaving."

There was a catch of excitement in Nore's voice as he spoke. Domski stepped back into the shadow, wishing for the moment that he had not come and that the two might greet each other unobserved.

A surprise! It was that indeed. The door opened quickly and a pale, sweet-faced woman in brown opened it and stood silently staring. Then as though all the love in the world touched suddenly her face and eyes, she held out her arms.

"My son," she cried out, "my son."

CHAPTER VII

STELLA'S NEW FRIEND

"NILS WICANDER and Karl Malmstrom were to be here with Bjorn at eight. There they are, girls, see, there by the first torch." Valfried fastened her fur cape firmly on her heavy woolen jersey, and, catching Stella by the hand, ran forward to join Audrey. They ran along a drift-bordered path toward a flaring torch, and Bjorn and his brother cadets came forward to meet them.

They had had to come directly from their school in the navy yard and would have only a little over an hour in which to coast with the girls, for by ten o'clock they must be back at school or face school arrest, guard duty, and possibly imprisonment for several days.

The six stood together for a while in a little laughing group, Nils Wicander and Audrey greeting each other and reminiscing at once over the time two years ago, the old castle on the rocks, days when they had sailed, danced, made taffy, and picnicked, and of the jolly party which Audrey had persuaded her grandfather to let her have before she and Sven left for America.

"It was all so splendid. You know, Audrey, Ingeborg and I had never seen the inside of the castle until we knew you, although Mother used sometimes to go there to see your Tante Greta. Do you remember getting ready for the party? Wasn't it jolly?" Nils beamed his pleasure at seeing Audrey again.

"That was wonderful," Valfried put in. "It was like a storybook, Nore Carlson dressed like the picture in the tower."

Bjorn helped Stella up the slippery bank to the landing by the first porch. Stella liked him and although he did not admire her as he did Audrey, he thought her a nice, quiet little thing, not as strong as the other girls and not as ready to enjoy herself.

"We'll all have a good time at Christmas," Bjorn said to Stella as they stood by the torch waiting for a laughing crowd of friends to start off. They all had long low sledges about a foot from the ground, covered with long woolen cushions in bright colors.

Everything was new to Stella. Stockholm with its gayety, its color bubbling up through the icy darkness, its great square filled with Christmas trees, its light and sparkle and music, seemed to her like an enchanted city. It was four days yet until Christmas, but already the city seemed to sing with joy. This great place in its wild setting of snow, darkness, and flaring torches seemed uncanny, and the gigantic stretch of ice beyond her frightened Stella.

"We're not going to coast down there?" she spoke to Bjorn, and he noticed that there was a tremor in her voice and that she shuddered.

"Yes, that's the ice hill. It's like glass, isn't it? It's a bit steep, but not so bad when you're used to it," he answered.

The others called to them and they went forward. Stella looked off again at the great sweep of ice which seemed to dip down to unseen caverns. Some words of Valfried's at dinner that afternoon came to her:

"We only coast with the cadets at Iddrottsparken. They are used to the hill and have spurs on their shoes. We never coast alone or with any one we're not sure of, not at Iddrottsparken. It isn't safe."

So far as one could see, flaring torches reflected pink lights in the ice, and all the way down clear figures of guards were silhouetted against the torch-lights and the deep purple gloom of the night. They were there in order to be ready in case of accident, especially at the curve.

Stella was afraid and the realization of it sickened her. She could not coast down that great silver slide. Fear held her.

"Come, Stella. You sit in front. Bjorn is taking you down. He's a good steerer," called Valfried.

"I—I'll wait until next time," Stella stammered, and when they saw the pinched look on her little white face, they did not urge her.

"She'll watch us this time and come down later on," Audrey said easily.

Bjorn jumped in at the back of Audrey's and Nils' sled, Valfried and Karl taking the lead. They smiled good-by and started. Stella stood looking after them, a lump in her throat. Shame held her. It was always so. She never could quite join in with the others. It would be a good while before they could return, for the pull up would be a long one. She turned suddenly, and then stood still, staring at some one who stood near her. He had evidently come along the snow path without her hearing him. He was tall and slight and he wore rough gray sport trousers and stockings and a heavy white wool jersey which fitted his lithe figure closely. He was pushing his sled along in front of him, about to wait his turn by the first torch, when Stella saw him.

The face—where had she seen it before? The taut white face, the cold blue eyes, the grave mouth? A picture—some photograph—Audrey's—the one in the silver frame, the one of a boy standing up on a fishing boat. Nore Essen, Audrey's cousin! It was he. There could not be two faces so alike, not a face as strange as this one. He caught her amazed glance and colored slightly, lifting his cap.

"You—pardon me—you're so like the picture of Audrey Bradford's cousin Nore," Stella stammered.

"I am he," Nore answered.

Stella's next words seemed to her a jumble. She was so excited it was difficult to speak at all, and

Nore's surprise was as great as hers. It was an astonishing thing to learn that Audrey Bradford was in Europe, in Sweden. She had written him six weeks before and had said nothing of coming.

"That's Audrey, you know. It's her way just to do things, not write or talk about them," Stella said, laughing excitedly.

Nore nodded, smiling. He looked with interest at this pale little friend of Audrey's who had come all the way with her across the wild Atlantic. He told her of his sudden great longing for Sweden and of how he and Donski had crossed from Paris and had arrived that morning in Stockholm.

"But you do not coast. You stay up here alone while the others sail down over the ice and leave you. Why is that?" he asked her.

The hot color rushed to Stella's sallow cheeks. She looked away from Nore and her lips trembled a little as she answered.

"I was afraid to go down," she said.

There was a short silence after she had spoken. Nore tapped one of his spurs against his heavy shoe.

"We are all of us afraid of something. I only know one person who does not seem to be afraid of anything. It is a girl who lives in a birch forest up the Skärgård," he said.

Stella turned to him eagerly, forgetting herself, for the moment.

"Guldviva!" she exclaimed. Then she told Nore of their finding the castle empty and of their going

on to the birch-wood cottage where they were welcomed by Guldviva.

Something in Stella's delight over the little adventure and her simple way of telling it, combined with the fact that she was a foreigner, obviously used to so different an environment, interested Nore enormously and brought the two nearer to a friendship than anything else Stella could possibly have said or done.

Nore looked down at his sled and then up at Stella.

"Won't you go down with me just once? It's quite simple, really. I've coasted everywhere, down caverns near my home, over rocks and hills—strange places. We'll be quite safe."

Stella nodded without speaking and a moment later found herself sitting forward in the low sled, with a taut white-clad figure behind her and a quiet voice in her ear:

"Now just sit still and think you're flying in a fairy dream, Stella."

She answered with a little excited laugh. There was the sharp scraping of his spur on the ice and then there was seemingly nothing more, nothing but sweeping silver, a great roar, dancing opal lights, a fight for breath and the delight of finding it again, the curve taken in a sparkling flash, the dark guards there, guards that seemed like pygmies as they flashed by, then smooth, steady gliding, mounds of snow, people's voices, somewhere the strains of a

band playing wild music. Then quiet. Stella never forgot the moment when, after Nore had helped her to rise, she stood looking about her in a white world, the sweet, icy wind blowing about her and far above her the glare of the far-reaching ice hill. Something, a certain bondage to fear, slipped away from Stella at that moment, never to return with quite its old dominating power.

"It was wonderful. Oh, you'll think it strange of me, but I don't believe I've ever been so happy in my life!" Stella spoke so spontaneously, in the excitement of the moment, that she hardly realized what she had said.

Nore smiled one of his rare smiles.

"You see—" Stella went on as they stood there in the frosty stillness. "Well, I don't know. I don't believe I can tell you," she hesitated, her face aglow.

"Tell me if it pleases you. Anything that you will. I am glad indeed that we have met in this happy way." Nore, too, hesitated a little as he went on, "I hope we shall be friends."

Stella looked off a moment at the far-reaching shadowed whiteness of the great park and there was a look on her face that had never been there before, something of joy and of courage.

"I haven't many friends," she said, looking up at him. "I don't make friends easily or enter into things very well. It seems wonderful to me for us to be friends," she spoke simply and honestly and again Nore smiled, saying:

"Then let it be so. I, too, make friends slowly, but I think that this was meant to be."

They ascended the winding snow-bordered path leading up the hill. It was a long way and Nore had the heavy sled to draw, but to Stella it was like climbing a hill of light and jewels. Her heart sang. There was a deep, quiet glow of gratitude welling up within her. It was all so beautiful, this strange northland, and in it she had found the first boy who would be a real friend to her.

Every one was excited at the meeting at the top, Audrey and Valfried particularly. Nore said little to Valfried whom he really did not know at all, but he showed his delight in his quiet way at seeing Audrey again. They had corresponded during their two years' absence and by her letters he knew a little about her life in New York and she of his on the Continent and in Paris.

They ended up at a little konditori for chocolate, the cadets swallowing theirs in haste, as the hour of ten was drawing near. They all sat at a table in a corner and drank the hot chocolate and ate cheese sandwiches with a relish. Nore told them how he and Domski had decided suddenly to come to Sweden for Christmas. He and Bjorn had always liked each other and he had often spoken with Nils Wicander when he had stopped at his house with fish to sell. It was all strange and different now, and yet, had they known it, Nore himself had changed very little during the two years. He was still quiet and shy, a

little cold. It was only that his ideas had broadened somewhat and his vision had deepened.

"This is what I would have adored having come true if I had imagined the nicest thing I could think of when I was planning to come to Sweden," Audrey announced as she chose a rich mocha éclair.

"Yes, isn't it thrilling? We must have all kinds of fun these holidays. We hope you will join in all our merrymaking," Valfried said graciously, turning to Nore.

"Thank you. I have come mostly to see my mother and the children. We are planning some fun for them and for Domski, Mother and I, but I shall want to see you all, too," Nore answered, and turning to Audrey, added with his rare smile:

"I must see you, and Mother and the others will be looking forward to a visit from you. I am glad beyond words that you stayed with Guldviva in the woods. Stella has told me of it."

"We'll see much of each other," said Bjorn heartily, buttoning the collar of his heavy coat as he spoke.

"We won't see much of any one for the next week if we're late to-night. Good-by, girls. Nore, will you see them home? We'll have to run all the way." Nils was halfway across the konditori as he spoke, Bjorn just behind him.

"It's always this way. They always rush off just as the fun begins," Valfried complained as the four of them came out into the frosty night.

"He's just as odd and shy as ever," Valfried thought as she went to sleep that night.

"He's proud. All the Essens are. He's charming but he's proud. I'm glad I'm mostly Bradford," were Audrey's thoughts.

"He is wonderful. He helped me not to be afraid. This is the happiest evening of my life," thought Stella as a friendly star blinked good night to her through the window by her bed.

Guldviva, too, thought of Nore, little dreaming him to be close by in Sweden.

"He is the one person who has crossed my way that has as deep a love as I for trees and snow, for animals and flowers."

So thinking, Guldviva put her head softly against Sno Konung's fur and fell asleep.

CHAPTER VIII

SUNSET

GULDIVA called Sno Konung, then she stood listening. There was no answering meow through the whispering whiteness of the forest. Sno Konung had been chasing shadows a few minutes before, wild with the joy of play in the sharp, quivering air, bounding over the firm, dry snow. He and Guldviva were out for a walk.

"Sno Konung," she called again, listening, and faintly a little way off came an answer. Guldviva ran lightly forward through the wood aisle, calling again and, at last, finding her pet high up in a tree clinging precariously to its icy branches. His eyes were wild with fear, but after a little coaxing he leaped down to his mistress's shoulder and crouched close to her face. Guldviva walked home quickly through the wood path. When she entered the little house she put Sno Konung down gently by the kakelugn. Then she went over to the window and looked out.

Sno Konung had been frightened. His sensitiveness had somehow felt danger. There was only one

conclusion. There was a fox about. Guldviva had always wandered off in the woods alone in summer and in winter, and she had often, later in the winter, caught a glance of bright eyes. Sometimes foxes crept down from their wild lairs, crazed with hunger. Several times they had crossed her path. She had liked to think that they came to the birch forest and she had gone out with food which she left for them at the foot of a far-off tree or on an icy knoll.

As she stood there by the window she remembered how once late in February, years before, she had come running along through the forest, when suddenly something like a very gaunt gray dog had appeared silently in front of her, green eyes gleaming, white teeth bared. She had held out her arms in the way she had always done toward animals and although she had known no fear, she had been surprised that any fox could be so large. He had paused there in her pathway. Her mother had smiled at the story that night at supper.

"You make me think that you have seen a wolf and that he looked at you and ran away. That is a fine story, Guldviva lilla. It must have been the hungry, runaway dog of some farmer, my child," she had said. Guldviva knew that it was not a dog, but she said nothing more. It had not surprised her that the wolf had not molested her.

"He knew I had only love for him," she had thought. She had always spoken to birds and

animals as though they were her friends. They had never harmed her.

Guldviva looked about her firelit room and a sudden loneliness came to her in the dusk and seemed to cover her like a gray cloak. She had never known it before. She had been contented with her dreams, her work, the silence and beauty of her birch forest. Her mother had never seemed far from her even though she had passed away. Loneliness this December afternoon had come on her. Her dreams were not enough. Her great love for wood creatures and for flowers was not enough, although it was there, deep in her heart. But Guldviva wanted more.

It was a week since the American girls had come to her, suddenly, out of the frosty night, and nothing had seemed quite the same since their departure. They were almost the first glimpse she had ever had of a world beyond her own. The summer people who came in large numbers to villas all along the fjords had meant little or nothing in her life. They did not live near the birch forest and although she had often seen them sailing, bathing, or having coffee on the rocks when she had glided by them in the passenger boat to Gustafsborg, where she went occasionally in the summer to sell her woven rugs, she had never had any direct contact with them. She was having even less contact with the outside world at the present than she had had the winter before, for the Carlsons, the only fisher folk

near her, had gone to Stockholm where they were able to live more comfortably because of the generosity of Master Eugene, the artist uncle of the boy Nore.

There was another reason why Guldviva was more alone than ever. She had given up going to the low gray schoolhouse on the far side of the fjord where for several winters she had gone. She was sixteen and she found that she could support herself by her weaving during the long winter months. She had had an able teacher in her mother and she had deft fingers and a quick eye for color. The books that Nore had loaned to her she kept carefully in her cupboard, and sometimes at night she would pore over them by candlelight.

She warmed some milk for Sno Konung and watched him idly as he drank it. Her thoughts were with Audrey and Stella. How different they had been—their clothes, their way of speaking, such odd voices. Unconsciously they breathed of an environment, an atmosphere incomprehensible to her. Envy had not touched her, could not be a part of her great, simple nature, but wistfulness filled her heart, a long undefined wish for a wider knowledge of the world, for closer human companionship.

"What was it then that made you all a-tremble? There is nothing to fear. Surely you know that. Nothing in the kingdom of love that one may fear. That you should know right well, Sno Konung lilla!"

Guldviva knelt beside her pet, touching his head gently. He was very near and dear to her and at that moment in her loneliness he seemed doubly so. She spoke to him simply words that held reality for her. She was right. She had never known fear. It had never been a part of her consciousness.

Would she ever see them again? The two girls had been strange at first and yet at once so friendly, so genuinely interested in her little house, the built-in bed, the kakelugn, Sno Konung, the forest. For two days they had stayed, running in and out from the wild ice and sun to the cozy warmth of the hut, playing with the stately white cat, talking at night by the glowing red coals, delighting in the good coffee and hard gray bread.

They had left her the third morning, piloted by Hjalmar, for the train to Stockholm. She had had a letter written in very strange Swedish from Audrey and a large box of sweets from both of the girls. The box was beautiful, red and gilt, with the name of the maker in gold letters in the corner. She wondered as she knelt by Sno Konung if she would ever see them again. Audrey had assured her that she would. She had invited her eagerly to come up to Stockholm. Guldviva gave the cat a final pat. She went over to a hook behind a curtain, took down her heavy jersey, put it on over her thick cloth dress, pulled a soft cap over her head, and went out into the scarlet and white of the world outside. It was nearly two o'clock in the afternoon and the sun

was setting. Far stretches of snow through the trees shone faintly pink, ice pools made glowing cups of scarlet through the silver weaving of icy birch branches. The sky turned suddenly blood red, faint pink and gold clouds drifted rapidly toward the west.

Guldviva stood still for a moment at the end of the wood path, listening. Her desire to come out into the forest that she loved had been born of a certain restlessness, a longing for space and air, a wish to get close to the winter fragrance of the woods. As she stood there in the whispering silence she knew that some one was coming and after a moment she knew that it was not the step of Hjalmar nor of any neighbors that she heard.

Some one appeared far down a wood aisle, some one who walked quickly and surely, with the certain swiftness of a person well used to forests and their ways. A tall boy with fair hair who wore a long white jersey and rough gray trousers.

Guldviva knew at once who it was and she put her hand suddenly to her heart. It was Nore Essen, the boy whom she had never forgotten; he who somehow stood for all wonder and beauty, he whom she had not seen for two years and of whom she had so often thought.

He saw her suddenly and came swiftly forward through the wood path. He made a motion with his hand which she did not understand. It was as

though he wanted her to stay just as she was, a white figure in a white and scarlet setting.

The next moment something happened so suddenly, so unexpectedly that neither of them afterward could ever tell very much about it. Something came slipping swiftly from the shadows and stood sidewise in the path, something long and gray, something with lips curled away in a snarl from gleaming teeth.

Nore stood still in the wood path and in the breath of time that followed Guldviva spoke:

"Come, what is it with you—hunger?"

It is true that as she spoke the first words impulsively, she did not for the moment think of danger for Nore. She had spoken to a wolf before. She spoke to all wild creatures. There was not the faintest shadow of fear in her heart as the sinewy gray creature turned its glittering eyes from Nore to her. It came toward her slowly, unhesitatingly, then turning quickly, it vanished into the far-reaching shadows of the winter wood.

It all happened so suddenly that there had been hardly time for thought or speech. Guldviva came on swiftly across the scarlet pools of ice. She drew back a little shyly as Nore took both her hands in his.

"It's so wonderful. It's a fairy story. It isn't real, is it? The snow and sunset, red and gold, the birch wood—the wolf—was that true?" Nore spoke quickly. He was intensely excited. His blue eyes

blazed. There was a touch of color in his white face. He had come from Paris for this. He knew there was a reason. So many things had happened. Audrey Bradford had come with her quiet little friend all the way from America. They were all planning happy times for the holidays and now this thing of wonder had come. He had met again Guldviva, the girl who knew no fear. A wolf had crossed their path and her love for all animals had conquered its hate. Above all, the picture he had dreamed of painting had come to him, the picture of scarlet and white and silver. He dashed his hand in his coat pocket and drew out a package, unwrapped it hastily, and drew out the scarlet silk scarf which he had brought Guldviva for a Christmas gift.

"It reminded me of you when I saw it in a little shop window in old Paris. It made me think of our walks from school in the red sunsets." Nore offered the scarf a little timidly. Guldviva took it, holding it gently in her two hands, and looking down at it. She gave a little cry of pleasure. Then she wound it swiftly about her neck. Her face had lightened. She might have been the spirit of the North, so much a part of the forest and the woods was she. Her face seemed a symbol of the northland, the high cheek bones of the Lapp, the straight, high glance and poise of the head of the Swede, and something more, the indefinable something which made her such a part of air and light and woodland ways.

They walked back together to Guldviva's home, Nore eager, excited, telling his adventures as they went, bringing messages from Audrey and Stella. Guldviva listening in her quiet way, grateful and happy that her sudden loneliness had been lifted by the coming of a friend.

She brewed coffee over the deep built-in fireplace and she and Nore drank it as they sat by the red warmth of the kakelugn, Sno Konung watching them in his interested way from his seat on Guldviva's shoulder.

Nore drank his coffee appreciatively. He felt happier than ever before in his life. The surprise homecoming to Sweden had been such a delight, his mother's and sisters' joy, the homelike, happy times in Fru Carlson's little flat in Ridderholm, Donski's welcome and content, the startling northern beauty of Stockholm, the meeting with Audrey and the others, and last of all, the seeing of Guldviva in the forest, the episode with the wolf, the inspiration for the picture which thrilled him.

"Guldviva, you live here alone. It is so strange and yet it is not strange. I can see that it could be wonderful and yet it is strange." Nore spoke slowly, gazing thoughtfully at Guldviva. She smiled and answered in her simple way:

"It is my home. I have no other. I have never known anything else. It is different for you, for all of you, even Marta. You live in cities now, great cities. You in Paris, she in

Stockholm, and the Americans, Froken Audrey and her friend, in New York. I know only this."

It was true. There was no complaint in her voice, no hint of envy. The house in the birch wood was the only home that she had ever known.

"Does the wish for something different never come to you, Guldviva? You see, I understand the joy of all this, the northland woods, the silence. I have longed for it in the very heart of old Paris, but, tell me, do you never wish for cities, people, the world? It is because I am your friend that I ask you."

Nore spoke eagerly, leaning forward in the low chair, his hands clasped in front of him.

Guldviva nodded. She sat back a little in the shadow of the candlelit room, the scarlet scarf about her throat.

"Yes, Nore. It may be perhaps because it is nearly Christmas that I was thinking of the American girls who came last week and of their world which is so different from mine. Whatever it was, I felt a loneliness. I have seldom known it before. That was why I went out into the forest, and there I met you, an old friend. You have brought me word of Marta and the others and a note asking Sno Konung and me to spend Christmas with them, so all is well."

"They felt sure you would not come. They said you would not leave your forest, but say that you will come." Nore spoke earnestly.

Guldviva smiled.

"I will come if you will wait while I pack my bag and if in the meantime you will nail some slats over Sno Konung's basket, first putting in his warm wool shawl. Then we will go, he and I, oh, so happily, to Stockholm."

Guldviva moved about swiftly and quietly, packing her things in an old carpetbag, while Nore busied himself with the basket. Then she went over to a corner of the room and, kneeling down, pulled a loose board, lifting out a box from under it. Then she looked across at Nore.

"It is the first time I have felt it not to be safe, the money Mama lilla left me. I shall bring it with me to Stockholm," she said, and as they made their way through the forest she told Nore about the visit from Lari the Lapp.

"I wish that he had never found my home here in the birch forest," she said.

CHAPTER IX

IN RIDDERHOLM

LILLEMORE was tired and cross. She had been nurse to the Zander children since Bjorn was a baby and she would have given her life for any one of them at any time. Yet she found them, as a family, one and all, exasperating at times; that is, all of them but Astrid, the youngest, who had just celebrated her tenth birthday.

Astrid may have seemed to others at times a contrary, spoiled child, but to Lillemore she was charming, even in her blackest moods.

"Dreadful, isn't it, Lillemore?" she was saying as she knelt on the window sill in the brightly lighted nursery of the Zander home in Strandvagen, a beautiful boulevard in Stockholm which overlooks the harbor. "Dreadful," Astrid repeated. "These young people staying out so late, gadding the way they do." Astrid's voice was unconsciously an exact imitation of her nurse's.

Lillemore nodded.

"It is dreadful," she agreed, rubbing her broad red face with a corner of the stiffly starched apron which she wore over her purple stuff dress. She

peered out over Astrid's shoulder into the black and silver of late afternoon.

"The Wicanders' dance is to-night. They should have invited me. I am a friend of Petrus. He is only eight and he is sure to be there. I shall stay awake until they come home and I'll hear all about it. Stella West has promised to tell me. Which one do you like the best, Lillemore, Audrey or Stella?"

Astrid tossed her plump flaxen braids over her shoulder and gave her nurse a sudden hug which was returned with interest. There had been a time when Valfried and Bjorn had hugged her, too, but that day was over, Lillemore thought bitterly.

"How your mother can let them go off in the afternoon in the darkness alone, I don't see, but it's not for me to say a word against an angel and that's what Fru Zander is. Now who else would have the young folks in and out all day as she does? These two foreign girls as visitors and Nils and Ingeborg Wicander, in and out, and all of them coming here for Christmas."

Lillemore smoothed Astrid's stubby braids absently, still peering down at the crowded brilliance of the streets below, and then off at the twinkling lights of a little boat in the bay which was close to a landing.

A moment later Valfried's voice hailed them:

"Lillemore, I'm so tried. Haven't they come yet, Bjorn and the girls? Ingeborg and I went to

have our hair waved and the others went goodness knows where."

"Where *did* they go?" demanded Lillemore. She could never get over this old habit of asking them as to their whereabouts.

Valfried shrugged her shoulders, drawing off her delicate, snow-touched furs. She, too, was tired and cross and Astrid's next remark did not improve her temper.

"You aren't as pretty when you scowl as you are other times, Val. You are not a very good-tempered girl. Bjorn told Lillemore so. I heard him."

"Hush up, Astrid. You're always eavesdropping. Lillemore, have our packages come?" Valfried exclaimed and questioned all in one breath and sank into an armchair.

"Packages!" Lillemore came and stood in front of Valfried. "Packages," she repeated. "Your room and the room occupied by the foreign young ladies are both full of them. The stout boy who tried to remove them from the droska stumbled and fell over a mound of snow and an avalanche came tumbling into the entry."

Astrid shrieked with laughter at this and Valfried smiled wearily.

"I'm glad they're here, but I do wish Bjorn and the girls would make their appearance," she said.

Lillemore knelt down and drew off Valfried's fur-topped boots with angry jerks.

"It's not like the old days, as I've been saying

to Froken Astrid. Why your blessed mother doesn't worry more I don't understand. Where are Master Bjorn and the young ladies?" Lillemore demanded again, puffing a little from her exertion and glaring at Valfried.

"Well, I'll tell you. They've gone over to Ridderholm to make a call on the Carlsons. Fru Carlson has a little flat over there. She sews, you know. Nore is here from Paris. We told you about our meeting, all of us, at Iddrottsparken and having coffee afterward. He calls her mother still, Lillemore."

Valfried yawned as she spoke, frowning the next moment.

"It's all so mixed up and confused. He's really the young Count Essen and it never seems to occur to him. The only thing he said directly to me, alone, when we were coasting was that his sister Marta had passed highest in her midwinter examinations. That weird little Domski is with him at the Carlsons."

Lillemore rose to her feet and stood with her hands on her broad hips. All her ill humor had vanished in the delight of having Valfried's confidence.

"As you say, it's all kind of mixed up and queer and that's the way it is in life, Froken Valfried. That's——"

"Very well, Lillemore. I suppose it is!" Valfried jumped up and ran over to the window.

Valfried was puzzled. She had never been in a

parallel situation before and she did not know just what to think of it. She was more interested in Nore Essen than she had ever been in any one, except Audrey, and she wanted him to like her and to turn to her with looks of confidence and affection such as he gave to his cousin Audrey. She wanted him to be her friend. Valfried had not a very wide vision of things. She had always lived in her own little sheltered world and she did not know at the moment just what to do or how to act.

The Zanders had always seen the Carlson children who lived in the fishing hut on the shore opposite the castle on the rocks. Sunhem, the Zanders' summer place, was just a little way up the bay. They had often seen Nore Carlson as he sailed by, his boat piled high with fish. He had always been a shy, quiet creature and had seldom responded to the Zander children's well-meant, friendly greetings.

Then suddenly, amazingly, it was discovered that Nore Carlson was really Nore Essen, heir to the old count. After that, Nore had gone away to the Continent with his Uncle Eugene, the brother of his Russian mother.

Now Nore had come back, the glamour of his romantic life about him. Valfried had been overjoyed at his appearance at Iddrottsparken. He would indeed be an addition to their group, but there was something aloof about him, something that made her feel him to be difficult to know. He had spoken of the Carlsons as his family and

although he did not seem to purposely avoid any mention of the castle on the rocks, he had not, in all the conversation back and forth, mentioned it voluntarily. Valfried stood with one knee on the window sill looking out across the bay.

Audrey had said after their shopping that she wanted to go to see the Carlsons, and Bjorn, who was at home until after Christmas, had offered to escort her and Stella.

After leaving Valfried and Ingeborg at the hairdresser's, the three of them had boarded one of the small ferryboats that ply from the new part of Stockholm to the old and had chugged through the floating ice, delighting in the tingling air, and the gay white loveliness of the icy harbor. The joyful, gala atmosphere of Christmas seemed everywhere, even touching the faces of the sailors who manned the boat and of the many package-laden people that were on board it.

It was a surprise visit and Audrey could only hope that she would find them all at home. She was glad that Valfried had not come with them, for much as she loved her friend, she realized that she was not quite capable of understanding the situation. Audrey's heart beat high with excitement as she climbed the roughly hewn, dark stairway leading to Fru Carlson's flat in old Ridderholm. The door was opened by little Thure who gave a squeal of delight when she saw them, calling back over her plump shoulder:

"It's Froken Audrey and her friends, Mama."

There was a murmur of welcome from the brightly lighted sitting room. Fru Carlson came forward in her neat brown frock, smiling a welcome, a touch of color in her cheeks, and rosy-cheeked, eager-eyed Marta followed her. The three visitors were escorted into a room full of Christmas preparations.

"Domski!"

Audrey's voice rang out gladly as the squat little figure came limping eagerly toward her. She grasped his hand and suddenly the two years seemed to slip away. She was inviting him to a party at the castle on the rocks. It was blue and gold summertime and there was mystery in the air.

Nore, they explained, had gone to see Guldviva. They hoped he had persuaded her to come back with him to spend the Christmas holiday time with them all. Fru Carlson went into the little kitchen to brew some fresh coffee and Marta and Thure carried it in a tray with the best white and gilt coffee cups on it.

It was a happy hour. Audrey and Stella drank delicious coffee and ate crisp, freshly baked pepparkakor and felt both of them as though a little bit of real Christmas had already come there in the simple room.

"Do you think Guldviva will really come back with Nore, Mama?" Marta asked a little anxiously, as she sat down on a red footstool at Audrey's feet.

Fru Carlson shook her head as she poured some cream into one of the white and gilt cups.

"It is not easy to persuade her to leave the house in the birch wood. She is not like the rest of us. She does not seem to need others of her kind about her. I am glad indeed that you and your friend went to her from the castle, Froken Audrey."

Just then there was a rattle of a key in the door and Fru Carlson looked up. The next moment Marta rushed toward it with a glad cry.

"Guldviva!"

It was she, clad in her sheepskin cloak and holding Sno Konung's basket carefully. Behind her came Nore carrying the carpetbag.

The next moments were full of a happy confusion. Every one seemed to talk at once, welcoming each other. Every one was excited and touched with the merriment of the holiday time except Guldviva, who was as always quiet and grave, though her eyes shone happily. She was to share Marta's room, and after a bit the two girls went away so that Guldviva could remove her heavy cloak and other outdoor apparel.

Audrey was talking earnestly and mysteriously to Fru Carlson in a corner of the room.

"The day after Christmas, say that you will, dear Fru Carlson. Tante Greta will gladly consent if she knows you will be with us. Think of it, a house party at the castle on the rocks, won't it be simply thrilling? I've not told any one, even Stella. It's

all to be a surprise. Fru Zander knows and I think she's sort of relieved to have us all disappear after Christmas for a few days. Ingeborg and Nils can come and I want all of you."

With her hand on Fru Carlson's arm, Audrey turned to Domski who was clearing away the coffee things. He came up to her eagerly.

"Listen, Domski, you are so splendid at planning things and at keeping secrets." Audrey glanced across the room to where Nore and Stella were talking quietly, standing by the kakelugn. "I'm having a house party at the castle on the rocks. We're going out the day after Christmas. I want you to help, will you?"

Domski nodded emphatically, his black eyes snapping.

"Yes, Froken, yes. I shall help. You will see. You do not mean," he went on a little timidly, "you do not mean that I am to come."

Audrey patted his shoulder, laughing out so merrily that Nore and Stella glanced smilingly toward her.

"Yes, yes, little Domski. You are to come, most assuredly," she exclaimed softly, and then turned again toward Fru Carlson, who smiled reassuringly.

"I had a letter this morning from the Countess Greta. I was already in your secret. You see, the Froken and I are having a holiday at Christmas. I will gladly go with your little party. It is indeed

a happy Christmas for us all now that you and your friend have come, and Nore and Domski too."

Fru Carlson looked lovingly across the room at the boy who would always be to her, deep in her heart, whatever might befall, her oldest son.

Stella's cheeks were pink, her eyes smiling. Her shyness seemed to have fallen away from her. Nore was the first boy she had ever had for a friend. She had found to her joy that she was at her ease with him.

"Christmas seems everywhere here. It's different from anything else. It seems to touch every one, not just a few. Everybody seems different," Stella was saying.

"It is always that way in the northland and I'm glad you and Audrey will see it," Nore answered. Then he told them briefly and simply of the meeting with the wolf in the birch-wood forest and of how Guldviva had come fearlessly toward it and it had slunk away into the shadows.

There was something startling about the little incident told there in the quiet, homelike room. Audrey and Stella both thought of it intently as they walked with Bjorn toward the ferry.

"Guldviva is different from any one else, isn't she, Audrey?" Stella said as they stood on the little, wind-swept deck, looking back at the great palace where lights shone faintly.

"Yes, look, Stella. Do you see that strange Lapp man? I'm sure he was loitering near the Carlson

flat. I noticed him when we went in. There are so few Lapps in Stockholm. It seems rather a funny thing to me. Guldviva's partly a Lapp, you know. You can tell it by her face."

"I wish we hadn't seen him, Audrey. He's the one thing that doesn't look Christmassy," Stella whispered.

"I'm glad I saw him, for I'm going to keep an eye on him," Audrey answered brightly as they followed Bjorn down the little gangplank to the landing.

CHAPTER X

INGEBORG'S DANCE

"WALK through Stor Torget— What are you saying? Why on earth should any one want to leave a dance to roam around a market square late at night? You certainly are eccentric, Val. You——"

Bjorn was interrupted by a flow of words from his sister Valfried.

"You have about as much esprit, Bjorn Zander, as a cow."

"What's esprit, Val?" questioned Astrid, who stood gazing at Valfried's pale blue gauze finery.

"I don't know exactly, Miss Curious, but whatever it is, Bjorn hasn't got it," Valfried answered, grabbing a dish of chocolates and reaching up to put it on a white shelf above her dressing table. "You simply must not eat any more sweets, Astrid. How can you be so greedy?"

"Stor Torget!—" Bjorn began and was again cut short. He was ready for the Wicander dance and looked very manly if not exactly handsome in his neat dark blue uniform.

"Bjorn Zander, how you do go on. You are so literal." Valfried stood up and surveyed herself

in her long oval glass. She was lovely in the pale blue chiffon, a tiny band of rhinestones and rosebuds about her deeply waved bobbed hair. She was the prettiest of any of the girls of her acquaintance. She knew it and, without being particularly conceited about it, rejoiced in it.

A little later they were all, including Herr and Fru Zander, welcomed by Ingeborg Wicander and her mother and brother, and were at once a part of the festive Christmas party. There was something of old Christmas about the whole atmosphere of the delightful house—the pine-decorated rooms, the happy faces, the rollicking music—which made a scene of great charm.

Ingeborg wore a green frock which contrasted beautifully with her dark, interesting face. Ingeborg was studying art. She seemed older than Valfried, although they were in reality just the same age.

"When shall I ever really see you, Audrey? I want you for a long day, just the two of us. We'll roam about the museum and have lunch somewhere," Ingeborg said hastily. "I must speak to the servants about the ices for supper. They're to be coffee and in the shape of porcupines with taffy stuck in for quills. Do you remember your wonderful funny party at the castle on the rocks, you dear Audrey?"

Ingeborg rushed off and Audrey was claimed for a dance. Every one, old and young, seemed to be a part of the evening's fun.

"I love it," Audrey said to Stella. "You don't find it like this very much any more. It's old-timey. Now some one is coming so I've only time to tell you that we're all going to the castle on the rocks the day after Christmas for a house party." Audrey spoke excitedly. Her cheeks were like American Beauty roses and her eyes shone. She wore a cerise crepe frock and Bjorn had fastened a sprig of holly on her shoulder. Stella wore a pretty tan frock, a soft scarf of gold tissue about her shoulders. There was a touch of color on her face and a happy, animated expression that Audrey was glad to see.

"Sorry you came with me, Stella?" she asked.

"Sorry—oh, Audrey, I feel as though I were living for the first time. It's all so fascinating."

Stella's answer was interrupted by the boys, Bjorn, Nils Wicander, and some of their brother cadets. Her heart sank with the old pang of self-consciousness. The shyness that she had always known took possession of her. She could not dance well. The boys would not like her. She fought all her misgivings during the next half hour. It was Christmas time in Sweden and there seemed to be no room for any thought but that of good cheer. For this one evening, at any rate, the fox trot and the tango seemed to be forgotten and Stella found herself a part of a laughing group and, somehow, she found herself dancing with the rest.

The Klapp Dans! She remembered vaguely that they had learned it in dancing school the year before.

She had hated it as she had hated dancing school and everything connected with it, but this was different. This was Sweden and Christmas time. Old and young danced. They stamped their feet and clapped their hands in an abandon of joy. No one was self-conscious.

The merry, fascinating music played by a small group of musicians in a corner of the dining room was an irresistible invitation to old and young to join in the dance. The fragrance of pine and the flicker of candles added Christmas charm to the scene. And everywhere, weaving in and out of the various folk dances, were the bright skirts and bodices of the peasant dresses of the different provinces. Fru Zander had begged Valfried to wear one from Skåne which she had worn for several years, but Valfried had shrugged her shoulders at the idea. She was going to wear her new blue chiffon.

"I'm past all that sort of thing, Mother. Ingeborg isn't going to wear hers and the boys can't wear theirs, now that they are cadets," she had said.

Audrey spoke to Valfried as she and a cadet came up to the refreshment table where the latter was standing with Nils Wicander.

"I've had a note from Nore. He is glad to come, he says, and asks to bring his friend Guldviva, the girl who lives in the forest. Isn't that just fascinating? Marta can't come as she's helping at a church fair, and Domski refused absolutely."

Valfried nodded, nibbling a candied grape. She looked like a fairy in her fluffy frock with her shimmering golden hair and flowerlike face.

"Yes—why, there he is now, Audrey, and she's with him, that girl Guldviva. Why, how could he bring her?"

Valfried's face flushed angrily.

"How—" but some one claimed her for a dance.

They made a picture, the two of them, Nore and Guldviva, as they stood for a moment in the doorway, Nore a little behind Guldviva. He wore the scarlet and white costume of Skåne. They had always worn the costume of one or another province at Christmas merrymaking and Fru Carlson had easily altered his for him. He looked like many of the other boys in native dress at the dance, except that he was taller and fairer and there was something in his face and about his eyes which made him not altogether Scandinavian.

It was not at Nore that every one instinctively looked, but at his companion. Guldviva had consented gladly to go to the dance at the Wicanders with Nore. She had thought for the moment only of her joy in being with her old friends, of going out in a happy, festive way into the silver night, of seeing again the American girls, whom she felt to be her friends. Now as she stood for a moment in the brightly illumined elegance of the drawing-room, she felt a sudden surge of amazement.

"You shall be Skade. You shall go out to-night as the goddess of the snows," Nore had exclaimed, and Fru Carlson's willing fingers had somehow devised the dark draperies that some artist had pictured. There was a twisted gilt girdle about her waist and on her head she wore a short pointed cap. Her strange face was a little paler than usual and her eyes shone like stars.

There was a sudden stir and murmur of voices and Fru Zander and Ingeborg came up quickly to welcome them. The next moment they were a part of a dance, and the merrymaking went on.

Valfried spoke in an angry undertone to Stella between one of the dances:

"How could Nore Essen bring that girl here to the Wicanders? She's only a peasant who can scarcely read and write."

Stella smiled out of the happiness that seemed everywhere about her.

"I'm glad Guldviva's here, Valfried," she said.

Valfried had a quick temper. It came like a flash and went as quickly. She was really warm-hearted and often very generous. But she was unthinking and at times unreasonable, and because she had always been petted and indulged, and in her own little circle rather a leader, it galled her to feel that a girl like Guldviva, a girl who had lived always in a hut in a wood and peddled her handiwork in the summer months, should be suddenly the center of attention.

She swung herself into a rollicking Christmas dance.

Nu ar det Jul igen

Nu ar det Jul igen

Efter Julen kommer Pasken.

The fantastic melody seemed to wind itself in and out through the candlelit rooms. It was impossible to resist the music. As they danced, they all forgot everything but the charm of the moment.

"It's fun, isn't it?" Bjorn said to Audrey as they stopped by the refreshment table.

"It's glorious. I love the music. It's different from anything and it's all so quaint, Bjorn." Audrey glanced about the throng of young people and then out at the steel gray and silver of the night.

"Nils Wicander and Karl Malmstrom are dancing with Valfried. It is the two boys and one girl dance. Val is delighted to be the center of things. Watch her," Bjorn went on, eating a pistachio cake.

"Bjorn, that isn't kind. Val is so lovely, and of course she enjoys the dance. See! She dances first toward Nils and then toward Karl. Then she turns away from them both."

There was a burst of applause and laughter as the dance ended and Bjorn and Audrey watched Ingeborg as she smiled and shook hands with the three and then went on past them to where Nore and Guldviva were standing. They had been watching the dance together.

There was a little silence in the midst of the hilarity and good cheer. Couples from the rooms beyond crowded close to the doors. Nore and Guldviva came forward to the center of the polished dining-room floor. The girl Guldviva, who was half a Lapp, and seemed so different from them all there in the bright Juletide merriment, was an object of interest to every one. Standing beside her was the proud-faced boy whose story they all knew far better than they knew the boy himself.

Then Guldviva and Nore began to dance. The chorus of guests took up the melody of the music as the dance progressed, singing the words. There was something wild, yet quiet about it, something different. They all felt, even those that knew it well, that there was an element of poetry about this dance and about the two young people who danced it.

Dancing with Guldviva that December night Nore was very happy. He was back again in the Sweden that he loved. He had brought joy with him for his mother and the children. He had welcomed his young cousin Audrey from America. And last of all he had met Guldviva in the snow-festooned birch wood, had seen her love for the wolf tame him, and had found in her the free and fearless spirit that somehow matched his own. Neither of the two had more than a thought for the happy groups of people about them. It was Christmas time. They both seemed, for the moment, a part of it and of the wild wonders of the northland.

"Weren't they great, Val? Wasn't it different from any dancing you've ever seen?" exclaimed Audrey as she and a cadet partner joined Valfried and Nils who had been watching the dance together.

"I've seen the dance dozens of times. No, I don't think it was wonderful. I don't think Nore Essen should have brought Guldviva here. She is good and she is clever with her weaving, but she is only a peasant girl."

Valfried stopped abruptly. Bjorn and Nore had come up to them, and under cover of the music, Valfried had not heard them. The color rushed to her cheeks. She half turned toward Audrey in her confusion.

"She is my friend."

That was all that Nore said, but there was great coldness in his voice and his eyes looked like sheet ice. Ingeborg with Guldviva in her wake came up to them at the moment and different partners claimed them for dances.

CHAPTER XI

"I HAVE NO FEAR OF SHADOWS"

AT supper Stella had a chance to whisper a word to Valfried.

"It was a shame that they came up just when they did. I know you didn't mean it."

"I did mean it," Valfried whispered back fiercely, a lump in her throat.

All the rest of the evening she had to fight to keep the tears back and she was relieved when at last the party was over and they were all starting home.

"Come, Val. You know the plans. We're all going to walk home so the American girls can see Stockholm at night. We're going through Stor Torget so they can see it. You do look glum!"

Valfried tried to smile and once a part of the merry, fur-clad group, tried to forget that brief, disagreeable moment when she had spoken angrily and impulsively and Nore had heard her.

Guldviva walked with Audrey and Nore with Stella. They all seemed happy and a part of the brilliant holiday night. Valfried felt comforted that her old childhood friend Nils was beside her. He did not mind her moods or what she said. He had

been used to her tantrums since she was six and he still liked her and was her friend, a far kinder one than cold, quiet Nore Essen could ever be, she thought.

The clock in the old Ridderholm church struck midnight as the little group made its way across the bridge leading to the old town. The silver sky was reflected coldly in the slowly floating ice of the harbor.

"I hear a harmonium somewhere. It makes me think of midsummer two years ago. It was so lovely then, the little boat covered with vines, and picnics everywhere, and the bonfire at Skarsen at night. Which do you love the best, Guldviva, summer or winter?"

Guldviva smiled joyfully at Audrey's question.

"Midwinter, this time, just now. I love it best," she answered.

"You look so happy to-night, Guldviva, and you seemed so happy when you danced," Audrey put her arm sociably through Guldviva's.

"Yes, that is it. I was suddenly lonely there in the birch forest. I never felt that way before. Then an old friend appeared unexpectedly there in the snow. It was Nore whom I had not had speech with in nearly three years. We were friends at once. We understand each other. We think of the outdoors, of animals, of beauty in the same way. It is something for which to have gratitude," Guldviva said simply.

There was a little lump in Audrey's throat as she nodded smilingly. She was glad for Guldviva's joy. There was no envy in her thought, but she herself felt out of touch with Nore. He was her own cousin, he had come so far to be with them all, and there was a little hurt at her heart that he had not sought her out.

"There hasn't been time. We'll really get together for some splendid talks," she said to herself as the merry group wended its way through black and silver winding streets toward Stor Torget. A sudden thought made her almost stand still. What a fool she had been, unthinking as usual. She had planned to ask them out to the castle on the rocks for a house party. Tante Greta had written that she could do so, provided Fru Carlson could go with them. Fru Carlson had promised to take three days' vacation and to come with them with Marta, Thure, and Karl, and of course Nore and Donski. She, too, had not realized, strangely enough, that the castle was not theirs to command, that the castle belonged to Nore. He was their rightful host, thought she. It and all that it contained were his.

He turned toward them at the moment. They were just at the end of the street leading to the square and in her usual impulsive way Audrey burst out, speaking so quickly and disconnectedly that it was a little difficult for Nore with his stilted knowledge of English to follow:

"I don't know what you'll say. I never thought.

Oh, Nore, it's so stupid of me. It's just like me. I've planned a house party after Christmas at the castle on the rocks. I wrote Tante Greta, and Fru Carlson is to go with us. I mean—was—for—oh—Nore, I don't know why I didn't realize it's your castle on the rocks. It's not my right to give a party there!"

Nore's smile was from his heart as he turned toward his cousin.

"It is your right beyond any one's. It is you who first made it possible for me to go there. It is you who found I was like the picture in the tower. The castle is more yours than mine, Audrey, and it is a fine idea for us all to go there."

Nore spoke heartily and Audrey beamed with pleasure.

"I've asked Guldviva to come, too. Valfried won't like it, but I don't care if she doesn't," Audrey said to Stella later when they had reached the brightly lighted, piny-smelling square.

Stella was silent for a moment and then she said slowly:

"I wonder if Guldviva will come. I think she is longing for her hut in the forest. I think she will want to go home."

Guldviva stood back a little in the shadow as the others stopped to look at one of the boats. It was dark there except for the flicker of a flaring torch and for the moment the others in the group were diverted by a man with a trained polar bear.

Guldiva turned at a touch on her arm and found herself facing Lari the Lapp. He stood just back of a torch and his head was bent sideways so that his face was in the shadow.

"I would have speech with you. You can send a word to your kinsfolk in the North by some one who journeys there before another moon," he said.

Guldiva drew back from him.

"I want no traffic back and forth with them. I do not hold them in my heart as kinsfolk. I have already told you so," she answered him.

"Nevertheless, some day you may go their way," he muttered as he disappeared in the crowd.

It seemed as though all the jovial joyousness of the Christmastide was centered at the moment in Stor Torget. Red-cheeked apple women in red shawls called their wares lustily from behind their pine-covered booths. Crimson apples, sunshiny oranges, brightly painted toys, green and scarlet worsted scarfs, squares of gingerbread mingled together in gay confusion. Voices high and shrill clashed with the rollicking lilt of a harmonium and giant Christmas trees, standing like sentinels in stanch number, lined the market square.

"Isn't it spicy and delicious? Everybody seems ready to dance a jig. I could this minute, I'm so thrilled and happy. The dance has been fun and Christmas is the day after to-morrow and then the house party." Audrey put her arm through Stella's

and drew her a little aside, close to a scarlet-lined booth where an old man was selling marzipan animals, little pigs and brightly colored vegetables.

"Valfried looks so glum. I wish she had not said that about Guldviva. Poor Val! She always speaks before she thinks. I don't believe she really meant it at all, but Nore was angry. His eyes were like—well, I don't know what, but something sharp when he spoke to her," she said to Stella.

"The point of a sword. That's what his eyes looked like," Stella answered, and at the moment Valfried and Nils came up to them.

"It's after midnight and they're starting to close up. The market women are putting things away. Let us go home," Valfried said.

Nore and Guldviva left them at the boat landing at the front of the palace steps. Fru Carlson's flat was close by and Nils was there to see the girls safely across the bay to Strandvagen.

Audrey and Stella both turned impulsively toward Guldviva as they said good night.

"Guldviva," Audrey put her hand on the other girl's arm, "let us be with you this Christmas time as much as we can, and, Guldviva," Audrey spoke earnestly, drawing the dark fur of her heavy velvet party cloak up closer about her face, "I am giving a house party in the castle on the rocks and I want you to be one of us. Fru Carlson is going with us and the children, too. You heard me tell Nore about it. Isn't it a wonderful idea?"

Guldviva smiled a little. She looked pale and puzzled and she did not answer Audrey directly.

"It is good cheer that you are planning, Froken, and I thank you for your wish for me." She hesitated and Nils called for Audrey.

"The boat is starting, hurry," he called.

Audrey looked back at Nore and Guldviva standing on the little wharf, and as she waved to them, Stella came and stood before her.

"Did you see the Lapp again, Audrey? He was there in the market square, such an ugly-looking man," she said.

The three girls, sitting in Valfried's room before going to bed, again spoke of the Lapp.

"A Lapp spoke to the girl Guldviva, there in the shadow of the booth. I was the only one of you that noticed it. He is probably a relative of hers," Valfried remarked, tied a filmy chiffon scarf about her face, and admired the effect in the long oval glass of her dressing table.

"She's different from any one," Stella burst out. "What is it that makes her seem so mysterious?"

"She is like something wild and yet quiet. What one of us could have gone among strange people and danced that way? She was never once self-conscious. She has no fear," Audrey said thoughtfully as she slowly drew off her crimson satin slippers.

Valfried did not reply. She had no desire to draw the conversation around to her ill-chosen remark about Guldviva at the dance. She was ashamed of

it, but would not have admitted it for the world. She was uneasy, too, for she wanted Nore for her friend and she had angered him.

"She is my friend," he had said to her, speaking of Guldviva. She knew she would give a great deal to have him make that same remark of her: "She is my friend."

Nore and Guldviva walked home slowly. Guldviva was so silent that Nore wondered if she were tired. When they came to the stairway leading to Fru Carlson's flat she turned and spoke to him quietly.

"It is best for me that I stay always with Sno Konung in my hut in the birch forest," she said simply.

"Guldviva, you are sad. What is it, tell me?" Nore hesitated, coloring a little. "Has any one said anything to offend you?" he asked.

She shook her head, smiling faintly.

"No, Nore, I have known only gladness except for a moment when a Lapp called Lari whispered a word to me there in the market square. I have seen him before. He spoke to me of my kinsmen in the North. He came over to the hut in the forest. He is not good. It is like a shadow near me."

"The Lapp! Why, yes, I saw him when Domski and I crossed in the boat. I noticed him in Stor Torget to-night, but I did not know he spoke to you." Nore looked puzzled. "He must not come

near you or speak to you again. I shall see that he does not do so," he said protectingly.

Guldviva gave a little laugh.

"There is no need for you to watch for him. I myself can do so. I have no fear of shadows."

Nore realized that this was true. Guldviva was different. She did not know the meaning of fear.

CHAPTER XII

THURE MEETS A STRANGER

DOMSKI counted his parcels. There were six in the string bag and one in his overcoat pocket. He put the bag down carefully under the little table in a secluded corner of a baker's shop in Ridderholm, where he had come for rest and refreshment. He had been shopping partly for Fru Carlson and partly for himself, a few last trifles which he had forgotten, ribbon with which to tie up his gifts, and two small almond-paste pigs for little Thure. A purple silk handkerchief case with "God Jul" embroidered in gold upon it for Audrey Bradford and a nice handkerchief for her kind friend Froken West, were among his purchases.

"The raisins for good Fru Carlson. She will need them soon for the rice pudding. I must make haste," he thought, gravely choosing a plump cream puff with pink icing from a tray. He sipped his coffee slowly, an odd, bent, little figure in his heavy olive-green cap and cloak, his black locks flapping about his wise, dark face. People turned and looked at him, but he did not mind them. He was not thinking of himself at all for the moment, but of the happy holiday preparations at Fru Carlson's

flat, the spirit of goodwill and excitement which prevailed there.

Two people had not noticed him. They were two men who sat at a table in front of him. They were drinking coffee in large draughts and there was a plate of bread on the table between them. Domski came out of a pleasant reverie at the sound of their guttural voices and saw at once that one of them was the Lapp whom he and Nore had noticed on the boat, the morning of their arrival in Stockholm. Lari was speaking in a low voice, but Domski heard him without difficulty.

"The ice is not thick now. Any small boat gets through easy to the bay. I saw some one coming through yesterday near Boo."

Domski had listened vaguely to the Lapp's talk. It is probable that he would not have paid further attention to it if it were not for the word Boo! It had a familiar sound. It was the name of the little town where he had seen Audrey Bradford two years ago, the day she had come to order a cake for her party in the castle on the rocks. Boo was just a little farther up the fjords near an open bay.

Boo! Domski wondered if he could have been mistaken. What could this Lapp have to do with Boo, a place full of city people in summer, but containing only a handful of people in winter?

Domski paid his bill, picked up the string bag, and limped out of the baker's shop into the dark street in old Ridderholm. As he walked toward

Fru Carlson's flat he resolved to speak to Nore about the Lapp and of having overheard him speak of Boo, but in the glad excitement that greeted him at the flat he forgot it for the time.

Thure ran to meet him at the door, her golden braids flying and her face shining with happiness and sugar.

"The raisins, Domski, the raisins. Mama is waiting to put them in the rice pudding. Do you not know that it is nearly six o'clock, almost Julafton? Come quickly, Domski, and you shall see the tree. Nore is putting the candles on it."

Thure tugged at Domski's coat, hurrying him down the hall. Glad voices greeted him from the little sitting room which was gay with pine boughs and red paper rosettes. The tree stood in one corner, bright with tinsel and tiny flags of all nations. Nore was fastening scarlet candles on the swaying branches. Mysterious bundles lay at the foot of the tree. Marta in a new blue frock was setting the round table for supper and Guldviva, with Sno Konung on her shoulder, stood at the window looking out. She turned toward Domski with a smile.

"Thure and I went out with bundles for the birds so they could have Christmas, too," she cried.

Little Thure jumped up and down excitedly.

"Guldviva climbed high up to fasten them. People stared at her," she said.

Nore followed Domski into the little kitchen beyond.

"I have an errand outside, Mother. It will take me half an hour or more. I want to cross the bay to Strandvagen to take a gift to Audrey," he said.

Fru Carlson opened the oven door to take a peep at the ham which was roasting there and then answered:

"There is a good hour before supper and you do well, Nore, to take a Christmas greeting to your cousin. Ah, Domski," she went on, taking from him the package he held out to her, "you have come with the raisins just in time. The rice pudding is ready for baking."

Nore came up close to Fru Carlson, speaking gravely:

"It sounds strange to me when you say that Audrey is my cousin, Mother. It does not seem as though she could be mine and not yours and the children's."

Fru Carlson took down a wooden bowl from a shelf above the kitchen table and then she poured the raisins into it. When she answered Nore she spoke firmly:

"You should begin to think differently if that is the way you feel, Nore. You should hold well in thought the honor that is yours in being now the head of so old and fine a family. You are Nore Essen and you cannot ignore your name. The day after Christmas we shall be journeying to the house which is yours by right of inheritance, the castle on the rocks."

Fru Carlson spoke impressively, gesturing with her large wooden spoon. Nore and Domski listened gravely and so did Guldviva, who had come into the room. They all knew her to be a wise woman. She had taught in the gray schoolhouse near Boo herself before she had married a fisherman, Knut Carlson, but it was not because she had been a teacher that they listened to what she said. It was because they knew her to be truly wise and one who did not speak undue words.

Nore went out into the darkness, his package for Audrey in the pocket of his greatcoat. It was a little rose-enameled box. He had heard her admiring one that she saw in a shop window. He did not see that some one was standing back in the shadows cast by a tall old house across the way. It was Lari the Lapp, and his eyes followed Nore as he went on toward the quays.

Lari knew Nore's story and he knew that the castle on the rocks was being made ready for visitors, but he was not sure who they were to be. Except for a certain shrewdness, he was very ignorant; his life had been spent in the far-away silences of Lapland and later in the busy, dirty, fish-smelling town of Varlo, where he had made a precarious living. He had never been to Stockholm until that winter and it was a journey beyond any he had dreamed of taking. He had come from Varlo in a fishing lugger and he was going back to the North in the same way. He had come to Stockholm

with a purpose which had not yet been accomplished.

Some one came out of the lower door of the old gray house in which Fru Carlson's flat was situated and ran around the corner. It was little Thure, who had been sent for an extra loaf of bread.

Lari came out from the shadows, crossed the street, and spoke to her when she came back around the corner, the large loaf of bread in its brown paper wrapping clasped tightly in her fat arms.

"*God Jul*, little one," Lari said as softly as his rough voice would permit.

Thure gave him a curious glance and then a glad smile. She knew by his dress and face that he was a Lapp and that her mother would not care to have her talk to a stranger, but it was Christmas Eve and her little heart was fairly bursting with joy and excitement.

"*God Jul*," she answered. "It is going to snow and it is a happy Jultide."

"The *Jul Tomte* will be good to you, I hope," Lari went on, trying to grin amiably.

Thure laughed gayly, dropping the bread and picking it up again.

"Yes, he will be. I know that right well. Nore and Guldviva have fine gifts for me, but I promised not to guess, and on the day after Christmas we are all going down to the castle on the rocks." As she finished speaking Thure ran on through the dark entrance of the house. The old Lapp looked

through the little window and cackled something after her, but she ran on, her thoughts intent on the Christmas tree and the supper which awaited her.

The Lapp shambled on down the street toward the quays. He had found out something that he wanted to know and he was quite satisfied.

CHAPTER XIII

CHRISTMAS

NORE gave his package to the maid who opened the door to him at the Zanders. He could hear laughing voices in some room just beyond the hall. There was the sound of noisy playing on a piano and the familiar tune stayed with him as he went out into the bustle and brilliance of Strandvagen.

Nu ar det Jul igen

Nu ar det Jul igen.

The maid had asked him to come in and he knew that he would have been welcomed, but he had not wanted to come in. He had not forgotten the incident with Valfried Zander two nights before at the Wicander party. He could not forget the way she had spoken of Guldviva. As he walked through the frosty air, the gayety and color of the city all about him, he thought of Guldviva, of her charm, her strange fearless nature, and the friendship which he felt for her. Coming upon her suddenly there in the beauty of the forest, the incident with the wolf, their talk by the kakelugn all combined to make his feeling for her different from that he had for any other friend. Romance came close to him.

It was just beyond him, beyond them both, but shining ahead of them, like the sun coming over the brow of a hill up which you are climbing.

He felt a sense of responsibility about Guldviva like that which he had for Fru Carlson and the children. He wondered if it were wise for her to live there alone in the hut in the birch forest and he decided to talk with her and with Fru Carlson about it. Nore had always been used to thinking things over in a quiet way. Ever since he could remember he had done so, fishing in the bay and along the Skärgård, sitting on some rocks alone at sunset, traveling on snowshoes over long stretches of ice and snow.

He wanted to see and talk with Audrey, but she seemed always surrounded by groups of people. He had taken her a rose-enameled box for a Christmas gift. She was his cousin. He pondered the fact as he made his slow way toward Ridderholm. Suddenly a realization of all that Audrey really meant to him, all that she had done for him, came over him with such force that he stood still for a moment in the snow. It was Audrey's quick intuition, her clever putting two and two together, which had helped to bring him into his inheritance. Now a grim old name, one that warriors had held proudly in the days of Gustaf Vasa, a grim old castle, gray with age, high on rugged rocks, the treasures in the castle, pictures, odd tapestries, ancient silver and gold plate, all were his.

He was really glad that there had been so little money left at his grandfather's death, only enough to care for Tante Greta. It came upon him suddenly that he knew little or nothing of this castle which was his. The truth was that Nore was a simple person, with much of Guldviva's lack of worldly values; much of his happiness, like hers, was in the beauty of the sun and stars.

Supper was just ready on his arrival at the flat and he entered delightedly into the spirit of festive good cheer which prevailed there. Fru Carlson sat at one end of the table and he at the other, Guldviva, Donski, Karl, Marta, and Thure ranged along each side.

Sno Konung settled himself comfortably on Guldviva's shoulder, his eyes intent on the proceedings. A saucer of fish was put on the floor for him and he jumped down to enjoy it.

"The American young ladies will be having fish, too. I wonder what they think of it," said Donski as he accepted a piece of the good hard gray bread which Marta passed to him to eat with his fish.

"What should they think but that it is the Jul-time treat?" answered Karl, a plump, red-cheeked boy of twelve, who had just helped himself generously to some of the rich yellow sauce which went with the fish.

"All of Sweden is enjoying lut fisk to-night. Let us hope that no one in the length and breadth of

the land is deprived of it," Fru Carlson said gravely.

Domski nodded. He, too, poured much sauce upon his fish and mixed it with a mealy potato. Domski was a Russian and he did not quite share the Swedes' enthusiasm for the festive Christmas Eve dish of lut fisk.

Marta cleared away the fish plates and brought in the well-browned rice pudding.

"It is strange to have a sweet pudding in the middle of a meal, madam. One does not do so in Russia or in any other country where I have been, but it is quite to my liking," Domski remarked gravely.

"There is a nice crisp ham to follow. You know that well, Domski," Thure said excitedly.

Nore looked across at Domski, and smiled, saying:

"This is what we came for, isn't it, Domski? We might be having our Christmas Eve celebration in the funny old studio in the Montparnasse quarter——"

"You are here instead, and isn't it all wonderful!" exclaimed Marta, her eyes shining.

"Day after to-morrow we go to the castle on the rocks!" called out Thure, as the steaming rice pudding was brought to the table. The ham followed as the last course.

"Now we shall *doppa i grytan*," said Karl, and

according to the time-honored custom in Sweden, each one dipped a piece of bread into the big kettle of ham grease on the kitchen stove, and ate it with the ham.

A half hour later when all the supper had been cleared away they gathered about the tree.

At the Zanders in Strandvagen the same supper of lut fisk, rice pudding, and ham had been partaken of and the merry party had gathered in the spacious drawing-room around a huge tree.

Audrey opened the little package from Nore first of all. She was feeling homesick and a little sad, although she would not have admitted it to any one. She felt that Nore should have been with her on Christmas Eve. He was her own cousin. She was far from home and she felt a great longing for her father, for the hazy blue shadows over Central Park and the tall outline of buildings beyond it, for old-time friends. The evening passed swiftly, gayly. Audrey and Stella were both grateful for the kindness and hospitality shown them, for the simple way they were accepted as part of the Zander family.

"Did you ever eat anything as weird as that Christmas supper, my dear? That lut fisk was simply unbelievable and rice pudding in the middle of a meal with ham after it!" Audrey said to Stella late in the evening when they happened to be near each other.

"Fascinating," Stella answered.

The drawing-room at the Zanders' was strewn with ribbon and paper which Lillemore and an old butler were busily gathering into baskets. Astrid was being led off sleepily to bed and Valfried was saying good night in the hall to a large family of cousins who lived at the other side of the city and who had been spending Christmas Eve with them.

"I'm so glad they're gone. There are so many of them and they're so noisy. I'm so tired, aren't you, girls? Let's go to bed," Valfried said, coming up to them.

"It's all been wonderful, Val. Such a jolly time. Everything was fun, the supper and tree and dancing *nu ar det Jul igen*, and seeing the servants have their gifts and all our lovely things. You are too good to us!" Stella exclaimed.

"Indeed you are, Val," said Audrey.

"It's wonderful to have you here, and the house party in the castle will be glorious fun. It's splendid to think that Ingeborg and Nils can come," Valfried said as the three girls went up the winding red staircase to the floor above.

Later Audrey and Stella sat by the window looking out. The harbor shone pale in the clouded moonlight, dark ships stood out against a cold December sky. Far off was the outline of white bridges and clusters of lights reflected in dark waterways.

Audrey and Stella wore corduroy dressing gowns, Audrey's rose and Stella's blue. They had drawn

the sofa in their bedroom close up to the window and had covered themselves with a woven blue and yellow Swedish blanket.

Suddenly Audrey burst into tears, burying her head in a blue sofa pillow.

Stella was concerned but not greatly surprised. She had known her friend since the age of five and had seen her weep before on rare occasions when overtired.

"Audrey is like a top," Stella had often thought to herself. "She spins and spins around gloriously, full of a thousand whirls and fancies, then quite suddenly she stops." She leaned forward and put her arm about Audrey's shoulders.

"What is it, Audrey? Tell me what's wrong."

After a few minutes Audrey sat up, wiping her eyes.

"I'm a fool, a goose, a—oh, I don't know what, Stella, but I am, that's all. Nothing is really the matter. It's only that I'm homesick, I guess," she said.

Stella sat back and said nothing. She knew that it was something more than being just homesick with Audrey and she was not surprised when her friend burst out with:

"Stella, I'm terribly, terribly disappointed about Nore. I can't explain it exactly but—well, we're not really seeing very much of each other. He's friendly, but—do you see what I mean, Stella? Do you understand?"

Stella nodded.

"Yes, I think I do," she answered slowly. "You haven't gotten close to Nore in thought. He," she hesitated a moment, "he is wonderfully glad to see you. Why, Audrey, of course he is. Perhaps he feels a little shy. You know you said he was shy."

Audrey interrupted.

"Yes, but it isn't that. I'll tell you what it is, Stella. He's more interested in some one else. I don't mean that in a stupid, jealous way. You know I don't."

"Of course I know you don't, honey child," Stella answered.

Audrey went on:

"It's true, I mean, about his being interested in some one else. It's Guldviva. He told you about the wolf in the forest and that he had an inspiration to paint Guldviva. He would rather be there in that stuffy little flat in Ridderholm, anyway, than with us. He wants to be a Carlson. Do you know, Stella, I think he hates the castle."

Audrey spoke dramatically and her friend was sure that already she was feeling better.

"I think things will be better after the house party. I feel that it's all going to be very exciting," said Stella. "Think of it, Audrey. Nore will be going there really for the first time since his grandfather's death."

Audrey nodded thoughtfully.

"He has never really seen it, with all its treasures.

He went away with his Uncle Eugene right after the funeral. He has never seemed to want to know the castle on the rocks."

The bell from old St. Jacob's Church in Ridderholm boomed out the strokes of midnight.

"It's Christmas day, girls. *God Jul* to you all," came a voice from the doorway, and Valfried in her pale blue negligee blew them a kiss.

At Fru Carlson's flat all was quiet. Marta, Thure, and Karl were asleep. The others sat about the kakelugn enjoying the rosy glow from its open doors. Guldviva still wore the scarlet scarf about her shoulders. Domski sat admiring his gifts, some nicely hemmed cotton handkerchiefs from Marta, some warm gloves and a scarf from Fru Carlson, and what he secretly liked best of all, a green and white wool bag from little Thure.

"It is indeed a desirable and wonderful gift," he said, holding it up to the light from the stove. "In it I shall carry home from market only the best dainties, mushrooms, truffles, oranges," he remarked.

"Thure chose it for you in Stor Torget. She has right good taste for such a little one," said Fru Carlson as she folded paper wrappings and set the room to rights. Then she came up to Guldviva and put her arm about her.

"Tell me, Guldviva lilla, will you not accept Froken Audrey's invitation to come to the little house party in the castle on the rocks?" she asked.

Guldviva shook her head, smiling.

"It is to my own home in the birch forest that I must go the day after Christmas, Fru Carlson. With you here in the flat it has been so happy, but"—Guldviva hesitated a moment, the others watching her—"the forest calls me."

"They want you. You are a part of it all," Nore said.

Guldviva smiled again happily.

"I feel that, too. Froken Audrey and her friend, I feel that they are my friends, too. I shall love to see the castle on the rocks. I have always wanted to be inside of it—and perhaps they will come to my house in the forest, all of them—a party."

Fru Carlson smiled lovingly across at her as she wound the clock for the night.

"That will be fine fun indeed. Will it not, boys?" she said.

"It will be better than the castle. The very best of all," said Donski.

"Scarlet and silver, that is how I think of the birch forest," said Nore.

Meanwhile Lari the Lapp had shambled home to his dark room in a gloomy, deserted-looking house near the quays. Christmas meant so little to him that he scarcely noticed the squares full of Christmas trees, the church bells, the joyousness everywhere. He glanced at the northern stars calculatingly. He was used to traveling by the stars and he was soon to take a journey.

CHAPTER XIV

THE HOUSE PARTY

AUDREY, Nore, and Donski stood at the prow of the small boat that plunged its way up the Skärgård, flinging ice in silver showers each side of it. Stella and Valfried curled up on the sofa in the tiny cabin, Ingeborg, Nils, and the Carlson children were in the stern talking with the captain, a wizened little man whom they had known all their lives.

The little boat whose name was *Efterat*, had entered one of the wide bays free of ice except for huge floating cakes here and there. A number of boats lay at anchor and others were steaming away into the open sea, bound for Russia.

"That's a queer-shaped boat. Do you see it, Nore, the one with the little square sails?" Stella waved her arm toward a dark, squat-looking little boat anchored close to the shore.

Nore did not answer for a moment. He was looking intently at the boat and after a little he said slowly:

"That's a yot. I've never seen one before, but I'm sure it is. It's a Finnish boat, though Lapps and Norwegians use them too, I suppose. Anyway they use them up around Varlo."

Before he finished speaking Donski came limping up to him quickly.

"Did you see that very strange little boat, Nore? There were some at Helsingfors. I remember seeing them once," he said.

Nore nodded and then turned as Karl called out to him:

"We are to alight here, Nore. Jon says so."

When they had landed amid much laughter on the rough little wooden pier, Nore, Karl, and Jon brought off their luggage. Jon was to drive up with it all in a sledge a little later. He had a hut close to the shore and in summer used his boat for fishing.

It was late afternoon of the day after Christmas. Fru Carlson, Guldviva, and Sno Konung had left Stockholm early in the morning and Fru Carlson with the aid of Hjalmar's sister who was spending Christmas with him were to make ready the castle for its guests. Tante Greta had written again begging Fru Carlson to take charge of things. Audrey had been given *carte blanche* by her father, who told her to have the house party just as she liked.

She had ordered all the provisions from Percy Luck's large grocery shop in Stockholm, several days before Christmas and Valfried had commented on it to her mother.

"She's wonderful, Mother. She knows exactly what she wants. She didn't forget anything, even the salt, and she's brought maple sugar and hickory

nuts with her from the States, and she saw about having the telephone put in."

They walked along the narrow waterway leading from the bay, all of them, their happy voices sounding clearly in the late afternoon air. Suddenly Domski stopped and looked back. Far out, at the end of the bay, the square, clumsy sails of the boat that Nore had called a yot were outlined against the purple black sky.

A Finnish boat, also used by Norwegians and Lapps. Lapps! What was it the Lapp man in the konditori had said about Boo!

Domski walked on slowly. He answered absently when little Thure called him excitedly and asked if it were not a wonderful thing to be actually going to live for three days in the castle on the rocks.

The castle loomed darkly against the cloudy sky. They all stood looking up at it before they ascended the steep winding path.

Fru Carlson stood in the wide open doorway to greet them. Audrey turned swiftly and touched Nore's arm.

"Go in first, Nore. It's your own home," she said.

Nore hesitated a moment on the threshold, then stepped inside, the others following, laughing and talking all at once. The doors of the great rooms each side of the hall were open and the giant white stoves glowed rosily.

"It is cold still. It would be well for you all to dance at once to warm yourselves," said Fru Carlson.

Nore turned quickly, smiling his rare smile.

"It is home for all of us for these three days. Welcome," he said.

The next hour passed swiftly. They drank cups of hot coffee provided by Fru Carlson and then found their rooms where wood fires snapped in the kakelugns.

No one quite knew how it was that they all found themselves in the kitchen or which one of them first suggested having supper there, but before they knew it, they were all busy helping spread cloths over the serving tables which the boys carried in from the stately dining room, where, in spite of the great lighted stoves in each corner, there was a decided chill.

The great kitchen was warm and cheerful, gleaming with copper kettles, and fragrant with the odor of freshly baked, spiced coffee bread and coffee.

Laughter and the sound of every one speaking at once, joking back and forth, and every one getting in every one's way, might have bothered many people, but it did not disturb Fru Carlson at all. Nore was happy and natural, entering into the light-hearted fun, and that was what mattered most in the world to Fru Carlson. It was all going better than she expected. Everybody seemed to enter into the spirit of a jolly midwinter house party and Nore

unconsciously was happy in the great castle which had seemed to him a shadow, a burden on his life, and nothing more.

Guldviva was the only one that did not laugh and talk. She moved swiftly and silently about, Sno Konung balanced firmly on her shoulder, helping Fru Carlson in the many ways she understood and about which the other girls could not know. They were soon seated, all of them about the two long tables, devouring delicious meat balls and round brown fried potatoes, crisp coffee bread, and goats' milk cheese.

"It's the very best time we've had, the very jolliest of all. It's better than coasting at Iddrottsparken or sleighing or Christmas or anything," answered Valfried, her cheeks pink and her eyes shining. She had found herself next to Nore at supper and was in the best of spirits.

"Not nicer than the Wicander party," put in Bjorn politely.

"Yes, of course it's a thousand times more fun. It is the sort of thing I've wished could happen, but no one but Audrey could really have carried it out—a house party of all of us here in the castle on the rocks."

Ingeborg smiled across at Audrey as she spoke, her plain, dark face alight with pleasure. She was a girl of fine mentality and some artistic ability, and although she and Valfried had known each other since childhood they were not very congenial. Inge-

borg liked best to spend her time copying pictures in the gray old Royal Museum or reading at the library, and Valfried wanted always to be dressing and dancing, the center of her own little world.

Guldviva sat by Fru Carlson, helping her with the coffee and seeing that the Carlson children had plenty of milk, and bread and butter. The gay banter going back and forth she did not understand at all—jokes that Valfried and Ingeborg had with the cadets, Nils and Bjorn, reminiscences they all had of two years before, each one recalling an incident and all of them joining in the gale of laughter that followed. Stella knew much of all that had occurred and she felt at home with her new friends and happier than she had ever been in her life.

Three times during supper Stella spoke across the table to Guldviva in the few words of halting Swedish she had acquired, trying to bring her into the conversation, and she was rewarded by a grateful look from Nore.

One might think that Guldviva was silent because of shyness and of feeling herself out of place among young people whose lives had always been so different from her own. She did feel shy, but her silence was not due merely to that. Guldviva was thinking of her birch forest and her own home there. She was longing for the white silence, the wild sighing of the wind, the icy creaking of the birches. She was thinking of the creatures, hidden in their lairs, of the quiet dreaminess of her little home.

She was bewildered. It was all so new, so different. These careless, happy, laughing boys and girls, their charming clothes, their care-free friendliness. Nore himself seemed somehow different from the friend she had met at home in the forest, with whom she had watched the stars late Christmas night. She rejoiced that he was happy and smiling, that warmth and cheer surrounded him, but she felt suddenly the loneliness which she had known for a brief while a few days before. She realized that she was different partly because of her solitary, quiet life there in the forest, largely because she knew and understood the ways of animals and birds, the wonder of the sun and stars, better than people.

"The dining room will be wonderful for dancing and not too cold by now," Audrey exclaimed.

"Let's stay up awfully late, crack nuts, and sit about the fire and talk," suggested Nore.

"I've thought of something else rather fun to do," Stella announced, and as she was quiet, not chattering as much as the rest, they looked at her and listened.

Stella looked at Nore and went on speaking. No one knew what it was meaning to her, this new, interesting life, how she was rising out of old fears, forgetting nervousness and ill health, timidity and dullness. Least of all did any one know what a delight it was to her to have made a real friend of Nore. The incident of the coasting at Iddrott-

sparken was the most startling one in her life, and a turning point.

"I was thinking of something Nore told me, that he had never seen these rooms, had never gone through the castle——"

She hesitated a moment.

"Well——?"

"Well, wouldn't it be fun quite late for all of us to take candles or our electric torches and roam all through it? It's very big and very old and late at night way out here—wouldn't it be fun?"

"Stella, you of all people suggesting it. I say it would be thrilling," Audrey exclaimed.

"Thrills and creeps. Heavens, Bjorn, stay close to me; one of you stay with me, I'm sure to faint," said Valfried, looking up in pretended horror at Nore.

"It's a splendid idea, Stella, and we'll do it. Fru Carlson looks as though she thought us quite mad, but you won't mind, will you?" Ingeborg smiled up at the quiet, pale face of their chaperon as she spoke. Fru Carlson rose, answering Ingeborg's smile.

"It is a good plan of Froken Stella's providing you are all careful not to fall. I've heard Hjalmar say often that there were many turns and lots of corners in this great place. I am glad indeed for you all to so enjoy yourselves. Now we have Norwegian pudding for a sweet."

Guldviva, Nore, and Domski started to clear away and Audrey sprang up to help. She was immediately made to sit down by Nils and Bjorn, who offered their assistance, and soon their second course, a brown and white wonder of whipped cream, chocolate, and bread crumbs, took the place of the first course. Just as they finished a heavy tread was heard, the door opened, and Hjalmar appeared.

He was greeted by shouts of welcome.

"Hjalmar, come in. Welcome! You are to have supper and then play for us to dance if we can persuade you," Audrey called out.

"You did bring your harmonium—didn't you, Hjalmar?—for we do want to dance." Nore came up to the old man as he spoke and Hjalmar laid his heavy hand on the boy's shoulder and looked keenly into his face.

"God knows this is a good night for me, to see you here in your rightful home, your friends about you," he said solemnly.

"It is Audrey's party, Hjalmar, and the idea was hers," Nore answered.

Hjalmar nodded approvingly at Audrey, who was talking with Guldviva as they cleared away the pudding dishes.

"Yes, she is a bright one, is Froken Audrey."

Hjalmar filled his pipe and puffed a moment meditatively.

"It is good to see you again, Hjalmar. I hope your rheumatism is better so you can go duck shoot-

ing with us later on," Nils Wicander said, coming up to the old man.

Guldviva turned to Audrey, the sweet, bright expression on her face suddenly shadowed.

"I hate to hear them speak of duck shooting, Froken Audrey. It is like something black falling on my heart. Nore hates it as I do, but these other boys glory in it. It is so cruel to imitate the call of the drake or the call of the duck. They lure them by their calls. I hate it—glorious, free spirits of beauty flying to their death."

Guldviva's rich voice trembled. She was at that moment, more than at any time since Audrey had met her, strange to her, strange and wild, herself like the spirit of the northland.

CHAPTER XV

STELLA'S DISCOVERY

"TO-MORROW let's go into the forest, Guldviva. I want you to tell me about it. I want to see the house in the birch wood again," Stella said to Guldviva a little later. Before she could answer Nore came up to them, saying:

"We're going through the castle now. Domski is lighting the candles."

Audrey ran up to them, speaking excitedly, exclaiming:

"We're all ready. Do come on."

Nore turned to her.

"Yes, come, Audrey," he said. He was a little pale as he caught her arm. "Come," he repeated. "You know the castle. It is really because of you that I am here. You found the picture in the tower that is like me." He spoke slowly as though suddenly realizing it all, and when the merry little group started off, he and Audrey, their candles held high, headed it.

Stella found herself with Ingeborg Wicander, Domski behind them. At the top of the first dusky flight she paused for breath.

"They are calling us, Ingeborg. Do run on;

Domski and I cannot go so fast. I'll wait for him and join you all in that billiard room on the next floor. Fru Carlson had Karl light it up and said the doors are open so we can find it," Stella said a little faintly.

"Very well, but I shall wait for you later on. We'll go up to the tower together," Ingeborg answered, running on ahead.

Stella stood uncertainly at the top of the long flight. How slow Domski was in coming. Guld-viva, where was she? It was evident that she had stayed downstairs. Nore for the moment had forgotten her and it was natural that he should have done so. He had the artist's absorption in the adventure of the moment and it would have been unthinkable for him not to have turned to the young cousin whose quick wit and interest had done so much two years before in helping to bring him to his heritage, the right to call for his own this great gray whispering castle of memories.

Domski must have turned back. It was stupid of them not to have realized that he could not very well climb up so far. She felt suddenly tired herself and for the first time since she had left America, homesickness touched her.

Each one of the group upstairs probably thought she was with the other. No one had missed her. She walked slowly down the steps, her candle flickering uncertainly. She would find Guldviva and they would stay together.

When she reached the kitchen Fru Carlson and a girl from the village of Boo were putting it to rights. Hjalmar stood by the door, filling his pipe. He had on his greatcoat and was evidently just going out. Fru Carlson turned smilingly toward her, and Hjalmar and Domski, who sat on a stool mending one of Nore's snowshoes, looked at her inquiringly.

"I thought it was too much of an adventure," Stella said, her voice trembling a little. A look of concern touched Fru Carlson's face. Domski drew a chair forward to the fire.

"You are tired, Froken Stella," said Fru Carlson, "and if you do not mind being here in the kitchen it would be well for you to rest by the fire and to allow me to brew you some fresh coffee."

"That would indeed be well," put in Hjalmar gruffly. He was rather confused and a little disturbed by the merry crowd of young people, and their invasion of the castle. He was pleased at Nore's pleasure and in his slow way realized that it was a wholesome thing for him to take possession of his heritage surrounded by young friends in a care-free way.

"I don't want any coffee, Fru Carlson, but I'd love to sit here by the stove and talk with you all. Hjalmar, won't you tell us something interesting? You have a store of old sea adventures to relate."

Stella smiled up at Hjalmar as she spoke. She

looked frail and tired as she sat back in the old-fashioned chair Domski had pulled forward for her.

"No one cares about my sea tales these days, Froken Stella. The old days are gone." Hjalmar sighed deeply as he spoke. He missed the old days when he had cared for the count, Nore's grandfather, somber as those days had been.

"Where is Guldviva?" Stella asked quickly.

Fru Carlson sat down in a low chair by a table drawn close to the fire, her knitting in hand.

"Guldviva wanted to go home. I did not try to keep her. She said she enjoyed it here, but she longed for the birch forest and that she wanted to sleep in her own home to-night. She and Sno Konung went out a half hour ago," she said quietly.

Stella leaned forward eagerly.

"You don't mean that she's gone home alone, that she won't be here at the house party with us? Oh, Fru Carlson, don't say that she is hurt because of all our careless nonsense."

Fru Carlson shook her head.

"She loves nothing as she does her own home in the forest. I was surprised that we kept her with us as long as we did in Stockholm. It was always so when she was a child. I would coax her sometimes to stay a day or so with my children, but she never would stay for long. She said always that she heard the forest calling her."

"That is well," commented Hjalmar, puffing at

his pipe. "It is the best life of all, the life of country and sea."

"For myself I like the town," said Fru Carlson, "and I am glad to be living there at last. I always love to hear tales of Stockholm. My grandfather told me many a history of the old days when he was a little lad there. I remember well what it was that he said one night—watchman used to sing:

*"The hour is ten.
God's mighty hand
Preserve our town
From fire and brand.
The hour is ten."*

Stella sat back in the warm corner, comfort stealing over her. She liked the quiet time there with the pale, earnest face of Fru Carlson opposite her and old Hjalmar puffing his pipe. He rose suddenly, knocking it against the hearth.

"I must not leave sister Hulda any longer. She had wished a word with you, Fru Carlson," he said.

"Please go with Hjalmar then, Fru Carlson. I'll not mind being alone," Stella urged.

"Domski has gone below for wood, but will return very soon. I know Hulda was anxious to tell me something. I'll not be a half hour gone, Froken Stella." Fru Carlson folded her knitting and went out with Hjalmar.

Stella sat quietly listening to the moaning of the wind, her thoughts with Guldviva in the forest. It

was such a little way. She would go to her. It would be an adventure. She jumped up, wrapped herself in a heavy cloak hanging behind the door, and went out into the night.

The silence was broken by the creaking of the icy birch trees, and after a moment Stella recognized another sound, a cat's cry. She stood still, listening. Then she heard it again and a second later a white figure like swiftly moving snow came running toward her. Stooping quickly, she caught it, holding it against her. It was Sno Konung, a trembling, vibrant bundle of fear.

"Sno Konung!"

Stella's exclamation soothed the frightened animal a little and he let her lift him up closer in her arms, but would not allow her to put the cape of her cloak about him. His eyes like green diamonds glared up at her in agonized inquiry. She went with him quickly toward the hut. The door was wide open. She knew before she looked inside that there was no one there and, like Sno Konung, she knew fear.

For a moment she stood there, the great cat close to her breast. Then suddenly her heart seemed to miss a beat. There were footprints in the snow, deep, square footprints. The Lapp's footprints.

The intuition came swiftly to Stella. She never knew how or why, but she found herself following them quickly, her breath coming in short gasps. She never forgot that wild rushing through the

wintery forest, the icy fur of the great cat close against her face. The footsteps turned to the right at the clearing and she followed them along the path by the quay, then stood still, stifling the scream that rose to her lips. The square-sailed yot was halfway across the bay.

Stella's conviction never left her for a moment. She knew as surely as though she had seen it with her own eyes that Lari the Lapp had stolen Guldviva and was sailing away with her in the yot. She turned and, still holding Sno Konung, ran swiftly back toward the castle. Her heart gave a great throb of thankfulness when she saw Nore coming toward her down the icy rocks in the moonlight. "Guldviva," she called harshly, the struggling cat escaping from her arms. "Guldviva—they have stolen her—the Lapp has stolen her. I found Sno Konung frightened, the door open, deep square footprints. I followed them. The yot is halfway across the bay!"

Stella called haltingly, breathing with difficulty, and Nore was at her side before she had finished uttering the last words. He wore his white jersey and was hatless, having come out immediately on finding that Stella and Guldviva were not wandering through the castle with them.

"Guldviva—the Lapp— Which way? Come!"

He took her hand and they ran swiftly along the black, frozen fjord, through the wood path which bordered it. At a clearing Stella caught his arm,

speaking again quickly and hoarsely and pointing out across the bay.

"There—see, it is only a shadow now. It is the yot, and Nore, Nore, they have taken Guldviva away in it. They have taken Guldviva."

Nore interrupted her quickly.

"We don't know. They may not. We may be imagining it. I'll tell you what to do. Run to the castle and have them telephone to the police in Stockholm. Tell them what you told me. It's not much of a clue for them, but they can watch."

Stella interrupted.

"They'll find them right away, won't they, Nore?"

Nore stood still an instant thinking quickly. He was white, and his face stood clearly cut in the dusk.

"He looks like the picture in the tower. He's like Rudolph and like his long-ago ancestors," Stella thought.

"No," he said simply. "They may not find them easily or soon. The Lapp has tried to steal her, to take her to her people in Lapland. It is a strange coast up there, strange and difficult in many ways. Now listen to me, Stella. I'm going to the hut to look for Guldviva's money. I know where it is kept. If it is gone there can be no doubt of what we think."

He drew a wallet out of his pocket as he spoke.

"I'll not come back to the castle. I'm going to help to find Guldviva. I'll send my mother word."

The wind seemed to take his words and twist them

into mocking jeers. Stella caught at his arm, her eyes wide with entreaty.

"Promise me that you will, Nore. Say you will come back just to tell us you are going?" she called out.

He shook his head and in his face she saw the obstinacy of the Swede and something firmer.

"No, I have money and warm clothes," he said. He took both her hands, looking down at her.

"I am proud that we are friends. You are a brave girl. Your name tells you rightly—Star."

CHAPTER XVI

"WE MUST HAVE COURAGE"

NORE turned swiftly toward the hut, as Stella started to run to the castle. As she turned, she heard a voice calling and saw Donski hobbling toward her. She told him excitedly in a few words what had happened and he, like Nore, went into the forest toward the hut.

Stella did not speak at all for a moment or two after coming into the warmth and welcome of the kitchen. She stood with her hands outstretched to the glow of the fire and she trembled so that her fur fell from her shoulders and Bjorn picked it up. He drew a chair toward the stove and the girls came up to her, Audrey speaking concernedly:

"Stella, you're so white. You're so cold. Why did you go out alone in the night?" Audrey bent over her friend a little anxiously.

"I'm all—right. Donski will be here soon. Phone the police in Stockholm that Guldviva has been stolen by that awful Lapp. Nore says they will wire to northern parts—Varlo, I think he said." She put her hand to her forehead a little confusedly as she finished speaking.

"Stella!"

Audrey shook Stella and the others crowded around.

"Stella, what are you saying? What can you mean? Guldviva stolen—why, what are you raving about? How could she be? Stella, say something."

Bjorn came over from the sink with a glass of water.

"Drink this, Stella, and you'll feel better," he said.

Stella sat up suddenly, waving the glass aside.

"I'm all right and it's true what I've told you, or we think it is. Nore won't be back. He's gone to find Guldviva."

Then she told them briefly all that she had seen.

"Domski ran to the hut after Nore. When he comes back we'll know if the money was taken, too. Guldviva's money is hidden there. Nore knows where it is."

Stella had hardly finished speaking before the door was pushed open and Domski burst in, his green cap awry, his eyes wide with excitement.

"The money is gone. Guldviva is gone. The bad-looking Lapp man who seemed always near the flat in Stockholm and about the ferries, the one that spoke to Guldviva in Stor Torget after the party—it is he who has stolen her. We are sure. I heard him speak of a waterway near Boo that afternoon in the baker's shop when I was having coffee, and I saw the Lapp boat to-day. It is gone!"

Domski threw his cap on the table and ran both hands through his thick, dark hair, making it stand

stiffly all about his head, a way he had of doing when excited.

They all crowded around him, Stella closest of all.

"Nore found the money had been stolen. It is what he feared. He has gone to find Guldviva, has he not, Domski?" she questioned.

"Yes, he has gone. Do not ask me how or where, except that we will help him. They have gone in Jon's boat to the open sea. More than that I cannot tell you for no one knows," Domski said solemnly.

The door opened and Fru Carlson came into the room followed by Marta, Karl, and Thure. They all saw at a glance that she had already heard what had occurred.

"Jon's sister who cares for him in his hut close to the shore told us. She, too, is in great distress, for her brother could not tell her where he was going nor when he would return. She thinks that he and Nore will take to the open sea in the *Efterat*. Jon has done it before but it was a perilous voyage. He sailed to Varlo and that is where we think they are heading."

Fru Carlson spoke quietly, divesting herself of her cape and shawl while speaking. Then she turned and looked at them all.

"We must have courage for them, all of us," she said.

Audrey turned to her impulsively.

"It is the hardest for you, Fru Carlson. Nore is out somewhere on the sea!"

Fru Carlson smiled a little, lifting her head firmly.

"I would not have him anywhere but in search of Guldviva," she said.

Bjorn and Nils came in later, a blast of icy air following the opening and closing of the door.

"We've been all along the coast below Boo. We phoned the police giving a description of Guldviva and the circumstances. Hjalmar is taking the early train for Stockholm. He is bitterly reproaching himself for not keeping more guard over the hut in the birch forest, for Guldviva had told him of the Lapp's visit."

Bjorn sat down on the kitchen table slapping his snowy cap against his leg as he spoke. His ruddy face was full of concern.

"If only we could do something," put in Nils.

Fru Carlson faced them both, turning toward them as she hung up her heavy shawl on the nail by the door.

"Nore was the right one to go. He knows the sea all about here. He has read much about the fisheries along the northern coast. I have no fear that he and Jon Larsen have put out to sea. They may be gone for a long time——"

Fru Carlson spoke quietly but her eyes shone. Her boy had gone off somewhere into the wilderness of sea, of that she felt sure, but she would not have had him elsewhere.

CHAPTER XVII

ON LAND AND SEA

"It was quick. It was the quickest thing that ever happened. It was because of you, Jon. If you had not acted without talking, if you had not believed me and just sailed away in the *Efterat* I might have missed the whole night."

Nore spoke close to the ear of Jon Larsen who stood up, purple in the face, from working with his engine. Jon had lived on the sea for forty years. He had been out in far wilder waters than those that thundered about his little craft at the moment, and he was far more at home in his boat than in the little house close to the fjord where he lived with his sister. He had known Nore always and had carried Guldviva about on his shoulder in the birch forest when she was an odd little mite of three. He had known and greatly disliked the Lapp who was her father.

"It may be a wild-goose chase, Jon, they may not have sailed north but something tells me they are headed toward Varlo. Most of the Lapps come down from there." Nore spoke anxiously, tying the heavy gray muffler Jon had loaned him more closely about his throat.

"They'll be making for up that way, I think, myself, but 'tis only a small part of the matter knowing their direction, 'tis knowing where they'll land and where they'll go when they do land that makes it a good deal of a puzzle. 'Tis all a tangle up there. I know it, I've been there with a bigger craft than this. There's eddies and inlets and rocks and caverns, and there's a mess of inner waterways beyond."

The wind caught Jon's voice as he finished speaking. For the next hour they were both too busy with the boat to have speech of any kind, and it was not until the first pearl line of dawn showed in the horizon that Nore had time to think. He stood by the railing looking off. Jon was right, it would be a tangle up there, it was a tangle and a puzzle. It was as though the square-sailed, ugly yot had swallowed up Guldviva like a sinister gray monster, and had vanished with her utterly, absolutely.

Suddenly it seemed to Nore as though something happened to him. He could never explain afterward, even to himself, and he never tried, but just when everything seemed like a blank sheet in front of him, when planning and puzzling brought him nowhere and there was only a waste of cold sea, and no word of encouragement from old Jon, Nore seemed suddenly to awake, something seemed to tell him that Guldviva would be found, and that he would find her.

His hands gripped the railing and he stood so for

a long time, looking off to sea. The first timid rays of a wintry sun touched his face. The wind lessened, and it grew possible to see something more than a blank, gray wall of wave. He saw a gold-touched ocean, and, far off, the outline of a large steamer southward bound.

"No matter what Jon says, we shall find her. She has no fear of anything, and that fact will stand by her now."

Nore thought thus and the newly awakened feeling became stronger, more definite. He felt suddenly grateful for so many things, for his uncle and Donski, for the gifts of his which seemed to be unfolding, for Audrey his cousin, and the shy American girl, Stella West, who had become his friend, even for the grim old castle on the rocks, above all for Guldviva!

Late in the afternoon Jon spoke an encouraging word:

"The wind's quiet and I've seen a worse sea in August than the December one this afternoon."

He steadied an old tin coffeepot on a corner of the table in the stuffy little saloon of the boat and gazed across at Nore with pale meditative eyes.

"Maybe some one in Varlo can help us. He's a whale man, that Lari—whale blubber, I mean. He never caught a whale, not he. If he goes to Varlo we'll spot him somewhere. It's the country round that I'm afraid of. He may have some one waiting with sleighs and dogs. Then it won't be

so easy, not so easy, but maybe it will all come out right."

Nore nodded, drinking his hot coffee. He liked Jon's words and they were the last thing he thought of as he fell asleep.

"Maybe it will all come out right."

The day had been a long one in the castle on the rocks. Bjorn and Nils longed to be of service in finding Guldviva in some way and chafed at staying home and doing nothing. They had gone to Stockholm immediately after breakfast, promising to return for a late supper, and they arrived at the castle cold and hungry at night.

"We've seen the police and talked with a detective. They wired to all the northern ports, Helsingfors, too, and they're working, but I bet they don't find her. I bet Nore finds her."

Bjorn spoke to Fru Carlson who welcomed the boys, pale, tired, and anxious, in the hallway of the castle.

"I'm glad to hear you say so, Bjorn, it would be Nore's dearest wish, I know."

Fru Carlson spoke sadly. It had been a long day for her as well as for the others and her heart was heavy.

"The girls have missed you both, as well as Nore. The four of them, for my Marta went with them, are snowshoeing. They could not sit about all day and the castle has been cold, in spite of all that Hjalmar has done to try to keep it warm."

"We'll find them, we'll go through the birch forest to the hills beyond," said Nils, and the two boys went out into the late frosty afternoon.

"I will have a good hot supper, and we must try to have a happy evening," Fru Carlson called after them.

When they were gone she mixed the ingredients for her favorite citron coffee bread in a big yellow bowl and ground some fresh coffee, talking cheerily to Thure who went back and forth with dishes from the kitchen through the long pantry to the dining room. This room was at last warm enough to use, although the halls and drawing-rooms had an atmosphere like ice, in spite of the bravely burning stoves.

"Let's see what good cheer we can have to-night. Guldviva is brave and Nore is brave. They would both want us to keep up our courage, to smile, and be confident. Let us therefore have a good supper, a rousing fire in the kitchen afterward, stories and games, and at the end of the evening a prayer in our hearts," her mother said to Thure.

When the six trooped in breathless from a run through the forest they found roaring fires, the fragrance of freshly baked coffee bread and freshly boiled coffee, and a look of cheer on Fru Carlson's face.

"Supper in five minutes," she announced, bustling about with Thure at her heels.

"Oh, Fru Carlson, what do you think? I've seen

Smorgas, my own pussy cat of two years ago. Hjalmar's landlady has him and he's simply enormous. He knew me, I'm positive of it," exclaimed Audrey. The others laughed and jeered.

"Any one would think you were about four years old, Audrey," said Valfried languidly as they went in through the entry to remove their outdoor coverings.

Valfried seemed different, no one could quite tell why, but there was something softer about her.

"I think Val feels all this as much as any of us. She spoke right out from her heart last night when she said she would give anything if she'd been nicer to Guldviva," Audrey said later to Stella.

"Guldviva is so unique it would be difficult for any one like Val to understand her," returned Stella.

"Well, I think you're a wonder, Stella; you understood Guldviva from the first, and—" Audrey hesitated a moment. "You and Nore became friends right away; you weren't shy with him, you understood each other."

Stella nodded, a little color in her cheeks.

"Yes—he's the first boy who has ever wanted me for a friend and he is the most wonderful." Stella's lips trembled as she finished speaking and the next moment she and Audrey found themselves in each other's arms sobbing, and it was so that Domski discovered them when he came hobbling upstairs to tell them supper was ready.

They turned toward him, half laughing, half

crying, drying their eyes with their handkerchiefs, and as they did so they both noticed that Domski's face was whiter than usual and that there was a drawn look about it.

"Oh, Domski," Audrey exclaimed in her impulsive way, putting her arm about the bent shoulders of the little figure in the drab suit. "You're feeling all this so much. Nore is your friend, you live together in Paris, and you came up here to the North together."

Domski nodded, answering gravely:

"It is true that Nore and I share lodgings together in Paris and that we are friends. It is not well, Froken. It is a bad affair. I am thinking if there is anything that I can do," he said.

Both Audrey and Stella thought over Domski's words during the cozy hot suppertime. Every one seemed in better spirits and Fru Carlson, sitting at the head of the table by the coffee tray, felt that she was well repaid in forgetting her own anxiety for the moment and helping toward making a happy evening for them all.

They all helped to clear away and wash the dishes and there was something very amusing to Stella in seeing solemn Bjorn and elegant Nils with red aprons tied about their necks, wiping dishes.

"Let's make a circle around the fire and talk and toast marshmallows," Audrey suggested after they had put everything away.

"Yes, it's just the right night for something cozy.

Do you hear the wind outside? Let me sit next you, Audrey," said Valfried, drawing her silver fox fur close about her neck and snuggling up to Audrey on the red velvet settle which the boys had dragged in from the hall.

Nils, Bjorn, Thure, and Domski toasted the marshmallows at the ends of pointed sticks which Domski had sharpened for the purpose.

They talked on for some time, now and then bursting into laughter at one of Bjorn's slow, funny sayings, but it seemed in spite of the fire, marshmallows, and the fact that every one was trying to be cheerful, as though all their conversation fell flat. Domski was pale and quiet and the boys restless, the girls tired and excited.

"We've talked about the navy solemnly, and the dance Bjorn and I are giving in February and Lillemore's crankiness, and how wonderful it is having Audrey and Stella here, but we keep thinking all the time of just one thing—Guldviva has been stolen and Nore has gone to find her and they are both somewhere on the open sea," Valfried was thinking.

"Something keeps going around in my head. It's 'The Skeleton in Armor.'

"Once as I told in glee
Tales of the stormy sea,
Soft eyes did gaze on me,
Burning yet tender;
And as the white stars shine
On the dark Norway pine,
On that dark heart of mine
Fell their soft splendor."

It was Bjorn who said the lines, and quick tears came to Audrey's eyes. She thought back two years to a rock overlooking a sea of gold and rose where a boy had said that poem to her, a boy with a tanned face and fair hair, a fisher boy, Nore, her cousin.

Far out at sea snuggling for a moment between the waves and then rising to meet their onslaught the boat of Sven the Norwegian and Lari the Lapp made its way northward. As Jon had told Nore, its destination was Varlo, the far-away, dirty fishing village, in its way an outpost to the vast wilderness which is a part of Lapland. It was so that Lari had arranged things with Harth and Guldviva's grandmother. Harth was to meet them with a sleigh and dogs. They knew every inch of the intricate windings of the strange country. They knew Lapps in out-of-the-way hamlets who would shelter them. Eventually they would reach the heart of the forest land where Guldviva's grandmother lived. Then half of the money would be Lari's.

Lari stood on the little deck of Sven's boat, balancing himself easily, rolling with the motion of the boat. Guldviva had said nothing during the time that they had been voyaging. The noise of the sea and boat was terrific. It was indeed almost impossible to speak above it. Lari had not liked to meet her gaze when he had gone into the stuffy little cabin with food for her. Her calm, unwavering glance seemed to pierce through him. Lari was greedy and crafty but he was not absolutely without heart. He wanted the money and a share

of a herd of cattle that had been promised him, but he would have preferred to earn them in some other way.

Guldviva had lain huddled all night and day under a gray woolen blanket. Thoughts seemed to fly about her. Her mind worked quickly. She was not in the least bewildered. From the moment that Lari the Lapp had seized her, there in her home, and carried her through the forest to the boat, she had realized his plan. He was taking her to her grandmother in Lapland and with her the tin box of money. She knew this and she knew that she must be alert and unafraid and that somehow help would come to her!

Finally she struggled to her feet, wrapping the heavy blanket about her and swaying and staggering with the wild rolling of the little craft. She reached the deck and there saw Lari resting for a moment from his long struggle with the engine.

"Lari!" she called.

He turned and faced her, holding onto the railing.

"Lari," she called again, "I am not afraid of you or of Sven or of my people in the North. I know that I shall go back to my home in the birch forest. I know it. Whatever happens I shall go back there."

CHAPTER XVIII

DOMSKI HELPS

DOMSKI pulled his woolen cap well down about his face, plunged his thickly gloved hands into the pockets of his stout ulster, and started across a narrow black strip of frozen fjord. He remembered the place well from the summer of two years before. It had been just wide enough for the Gustafsborg boats to pass through a dangerous place in which to be caught in a rowboat. There were no boats now. The little cottages scattered along among the pines were empty and there was no sign of life of any kind.

Domski hobbled along as fast as he could. He had three pieces of buttered coffee bread done up in a clean napkin in his inner pocket and he expected to be away all day. He had gone to Fru Carlson's room at an early hour and had tapped on her door.

"I am going to catch the early train to Stockholm, Fru Carlson," he said when she opened the door. "I think I may find some way of gaining information about Lari the Lapp. I shall return by evening."

Fru Carlson had given him the bread to take with him, first making him swallow a bowl of hot coffee.

She begged him to be careful and stood waving him off from the kitchen window an hour or more before the rest of the household was astir.

He thought deeply on his journey into Stockholm and as he slowly traversed the dark street leading from the palace steps to the lanelike alley where he had had his coffee in the bakery shop the day before Christmas and had overheard Lari the Lapp and his friend as they talked together. The bakery shop was Donski's destination for the moment and he was glad of the welcoming warmth and the odor of freshly roasted coffee as he came inside. He ordered coffee and when it was served to him, drew out his packet of coffee bread and had his meal at a clean deal table, his bright eyes glancing about the room, as he ate. His longing to find some clue as to Lari the Lapp's plans was so great that he did not seem to be able to sense anything else.

He sipped his coffee slowly, noting that the bakery man himself was serving coffee at the counter. When he had finished and paid his bill Donski went up to him.

"Do you know whether a Lapp who goes by the name of Lari is anywhere about?" Donski asked, looking up innocently from under his shock of dark hair.

The bakery man shrugged his shoulders as he made change for a customer.

"He's gone and he owes me three kroner for his room in the stable back of the court. They're a

dirty lot, them Lapps. He knew I had rooms and wanted to have one but I'd have no such truck as him in my clean house so I gave him the old empty harness room above the stable!"

The bakery man, who was a talkative soul, began to chatter to the next customer, and Domski went on out to the dark, narrow hall beyond the shop. He hesitated a moment and then made his way through a passage, opening a door at the far end. A frosty, sunlit courtyard met his eye and beyond the brown shabbiness of an old building. He crossed the court and went on through a half-open door into the empty, musty, unused stable. There was a gray, sagging stairway at one end, and after standing uncertainly for a moment at the foot, Domski slowly ascended it.

The room at the top was bright with sunshine. There was a tumbled bed in one corner, a small chest and an old table in another. Domski went over to the table and stood looking down at some pieces of brown paper and a quarter of a loaf of stale bread which lay upon it. There was also a gray rind of cheese and the stub of a pencil on the table, and a sticky plate which held some tobacco and a long clay pipe.

Domski had had no real plan in coming to the bakery shop. It was the only link he had with Lari the Lapp, and the only thought that in any way suggested itself to him. He now stood looking down confusedly at the miscellaneous collection on the

table. Then he picked up one of the pieces of rough brown paper and looked at it.

Lari the Lapp had scribbled figures upon it, trying possibly to add together his bits of money. He had tried also to put together a few words, evidently with an idea of sending a message, but the attempt had been hopeless and he had scratched a line through them. They were in some language Domski did not understand but which he judged to be Lapp.

He turned the paper in his hands uncertainly, a feeling of futility coming over him. After all, there had been no sense in his coming on this wild-goose chase into Stockholm. The bakery man said he had not understood Lari's speech and that he did not know where he had gone. It would do little or no good to question him further. Domski turned the paper over as he stood thinking, and a rough drawing met his eyes. He went over to the window and examined it. After a moment his face lightened. He pulled himself up onto the table and, crossing his legs, bent over the fragment of brown paper.

The drawing was clumsily done with rough, uneven lines. At first it seemed to Domski nothing more than the outlines of a house that a child might have drawn on a slate, but gradually his interest grew. What was it Jon Larsen had told them two summers before in his tales of sea voyages about the northern coast? What was it he had said?

"Varlo is the ugliest town you'd find anywhere

and the smells of fish gone bad would drive you fairly out of your senses. There's nought there but pitiful houses and whale blubber and warehouses. Lapps come there for whale blubber."

This sketch might have been a copy of one sent to Lapland. Domski realized this, deciding shrewdly that Lari had tried to send word to whoever was at the other end of the line, in other words to Harth, Guldviva's half brother by marriage whom Domski remembered hearing of two years ago. Lari had failed in his attempt to write a few words and so had drawn something of a plan.

Domski's lips were parted and his eyes sparkled eagerly as he sat examining the rough drawings on the thick brown paper. There was a warehouse, he was sure of it. And the half circle beside it might be—what? He frowned, then his face cleared a little. It might be an inlet in the harbor and the small square was something that might be a boat——!

Domski caught his breath. That was it, that was what Lari had tried to do. It was a rough copy, probably a first try-out of a communication to Harth in the North. He had worked out some sort of plan as regards a landing with whoever had helped him in his enterprise, probably the rough-looking Norwegian with whom Domski had seen him in close conversation in the baker's shop the day before Christmas.

Domski folded the paper carefully and put it in

his inside pocket. Then he walked slowly out into the bright morning sunshine. He had not come in vain to Lari's room above the stable. He felt sure of that. Lari had a plan of making for an inlet in the harbor of some northern town and Varlo was the only one anywhere near his destination, Lapland. Varlo was full of warehouses. Lari meant to hide in one. Harth would find them and somehow in the night they would steal away on sledges drawn by fast-running dogs through the tortuous myriads of waterways, and, once started through the frosty inlets and across frozen wastes, they would be difficult to find.

Domski stood uncertainly outside the baker's window. Jon Larsen's sister had told him that Jon on his rare visits to Varlo had stopped at an inn close to the wharf called Gamla Hus. She had no other address than that, and so sudden had been Jon's departure and in such an exciting circumstance that he had made no plans and left no word with her, other than the fact that he must help Nore find Guldviva and that they were sailing off north in the *Efteråt*.

Gamla Hus, Varlo—that address ought to be enough if the inn were one where whale fishers and traders stayed. Domski hobbled as fast as he could down the street to a waiting ferry at the foot of the palace steps, and a quarter of an hour later he was writing a telegram, a spot of scarlet on each cheek, his eyes shining. He sent the message to Nore and

he directed it to Gamla Hus, Varlo, Norway. It ran thus:

“Lari may land at some inlet along the coast, Varlo. Think he will take shelter in some warehouse and meet his accomplices there. Courage.
DOMSKI.”

He read the message over twice, paid for it and came out into the bright morning sunshine. He had done the little that he could and the thought gave him a feeling of content.

Domski knew the world fairly well. His journeys with Master Eugene had made that possible. He knew that the greatest chance of finding the whereabouts of Lari was at Varlo. He knew that once Guldviva and Lari had started north the chances of reaching them were remote, for only the Lapps themselves really know the way north, only they know how to lose themselves in the winding mysteries of their strange land. It would be almost impossible to trace them in winter, and in summer once the floods began and the waterfalls started it would be hardly possible, away from the railway lines, to get anywhere.

Guldviva knew this also. She had always heard that her father's people were isolated in summer when the frozen waterways possible to traverse with sledges, became holes of slimy water, and fields, marsh bog, treacherous waterfalls, mud, and flooded woodland made any journey to that part of Lapland

a dangerous, an almost impossible accomplishment.

The weather was fair on the third day of their voyage and Lari and Sven whispered together that by night there would be a glimpse of the Norwegian shores. The two men sensed in Guldviva something they could not understand. Slow-thinking and stupid as they both were, they realized that she was no ordinary girl and that she did not act in this crisis of her life as an ordinary girl would have done. She was quiet, self-contained, apparently calm. Her level glance met theirs and their eyes wavered and turned away. Now that they were in calmer waters she moved swiftly and silently about the cabin, cooking, attending to their needs. She asked no questions. She made no appeal to them.

Vaguely through the clear twilight at the close of the fourth day they saw the black and white outline of the coast of Norway. The two men greeted the sight gladly. Varlo was not far away.

CHAPTER XIX

VARLO

NORWAY through a mist of frost, Norway at its bleakest and ugliest, loomed vaguely through the late afternoon. Varlo's blank, dark warehouses, like clumsy animals asleep, sprawled along the water's edge and the sickening odor of whale blubber mingling with that of decayed fish was wafted toward the yot as it crept stealthily along far out in the wilderness of sea.

Guldviva had been very quiet all day, so quiet that Lari and one-eyed Sven had glanced at her from time to time, wondering why she showed so little emotion. She had as a matter of course taken over the cooking on the little craft, and now that they were in calmer waters, stood by the rusty stove, frying bacon in a cracked saucepan. Lari sat watching her as she deftly turned the browning pieces of bacon with a two-pronged fork. Her face under the pale light from a swaying lantern just above her was very white, the lips closely drawn. It was the face of some one who was suffering cruelly, but she said nothing; she neither pleaded nor prayed, she shed no tears.

Lari puffed at his stubby, ill-smelling pipe, his

woolen cap pulled down over his bushy eyebrows, his small eyes glancing nervously here and there. There was no real need for fear. All would be well. They would wait there in the dark until one by one the straggling lights were put out. Then they would wait for a while longer and at last stealthily, cautiously, they would creep in toward shore.

"You'll find your grandmother up north and you'll have a present from her, a female deer. She is keeping it for you."

Lari spoke clumsily, leaning forward, his tattered woolen sack bunched about his shoulders.

Guldivva made no reply. Lari blinked at her wonderingly. She put no question about the stolen money, asked nothing of what was to become of her when once they put foot on shore. She was cold and still and dumb and something about her made Lari uneasy.

They were safe enough. He was sure of that. They would anchor by some jutting rocks. He knew them well. They would find the water beyond them toward shore frozen like a board, and they would grope across the ice in the darkness and hide until their men with sledges and dogs should find them. Lari knew where they were going to hide and so did one-eyed Sven, and he expected that long before midnight they would have left Varlo with its telegraph office, its possible danger, far behind, and would be rushing through the icy darkness toward Lapland.

Yet Lari was uneasy. He sat shuffling his heavy wet boots, his head drooping on his chest. He had accomplished what he had set out to do. He had accepted the bribe of the shrewd old Lapp woman who was Guldviva's grandmother, and that of her stepson, and he would see to it that half of the money which he had taken from under the plank in the hut in the birch wood should be his before he gave the remainder to the people in the North. Yet in spite of a fair prospect of further success in their being able to make a safe landing and to escape from Varlo without being discovered, Lari was uneasy.

There was something about Guldviva he could not understand. It was as though she had some secret, some plan, some assurance of help ahead. It was impossible, of course, but Lari pondered the idea as he drew a stool up to the rude table which was clamped to the floor in the center of the tiny room and helped himself to the bacon which Guldviva had put on his tin plate.

The money in its square tin box was stowed safely away. It would be bound securely on his back when they left the boat. It would be a heavy weight and the edges of the tin box might be sharp, but it would be sweet to know that it was there and, once safely away with the girl, all would be well. Lari had visions of a hut well lined with fur, of a new hunting rifle, plenty of tobacco—luxuries!

Guldviva, as she fried the bacon, enjoyed rather than otherwise the heavy rolling of the odd little

yot. It seemed to ease the strange ferment of her thoughts. When she had finished the bacon she put a slice of it between two pieces of hard crisp bread and went out onto the little deck. She wore a heavy, not overclean coat of Lari's and she glanced down at it with a little shiver of disgust. They had borne her away from her home in the birch forest just as she was, in only her woolen frock, and she had been obliged to wear their outdoor garments in order to keep herself from freezing. The extra coat was fortunately at hand and although it smelt of whale blubber it protected her from the still, intense, merciless cold.

She stood close to the side of the boat, her hands, encased in a pair of Lari's hide gloves, clasped on the railing. The darkness had fallen and the yot was a silent, black shadow on the dark sea. Lari had fastened a heavy piece of deerskin across the window of the little cabin so that no gleam of yellow light should betray them.

Guldviva stood quietly by the railing looking off at the faint quiver of light far down the shore. They were somewhat away from the little town itself and only the dark, silent warehouses faced them. They were almost indistinguishable in the deep northern twilight.

Lari and his comrade talked mostly in Lari's language. One-eyed Sven had picked it up during his long sojourns in Lapland where he had joined in cattle hunts, creeping over the border into Sweden

and stealing many a well-fatted cow belonging to some prosperous Swedish farmer. That afternoon, however, Guldviva had heard them speaking Norwegian which she understood and the import of the few words was to the effect that they were afraid of the moon!

Yes, there would be a moon later, very late, not long before dawn, but unless a storm came on, and there was for the moment no prospect of one, there would be blessed moonlight. Guldviva felt gratitude for this.

Another thought lightened the darkness, the thought of Nore. When Lari had carried her through the frozen forest ways she imagined she had seen some one running, or what was running for him, a dark, square figure swaying with a quick, awkward, sideways gait through the silent whiteness. It was the figure of Donski scurrying toward the castle! All through the voyage Guldviva had held on to the hope that Donski had seen them and was rushing as fast as his crippled limbs could carry him to tell the news at the castle on the rocks.

She did not think or plan beyond this fact; she only felt that somehow Nore was helping, planning, full of thought for her and, in spite of all the wretchedness and seeming peril of her situation, the realization had brought a warm glow to her heart.

But as she stood there with the sinister darkness all about her, fear came close to her. It was the first time in her life that she had felt it, and some-

thing told her that she must look it squarely in the face as she had met the wolf that white and silver day in the birch forest when Nore had come toward her down the snowy path.

After all, she was so alone! She was being carried off into the fastnesses of a strange country in midwinter. A lump rose in her throat and tears burned her eyelids. She clenched her hands, then gripped the deck railing. She could hear the slow-speaking, gruff voices of Lari and Sven from within the cabin and she knew well that they were talking over their plans and complimenting each other on the success so far of their undertaking. For a moment the wild thought came to her to jump overboard and try to swim toward shore, but the realization of the madness of such an idea came to her the next. She would either sink at once, with her heavy garments weighing her down, or freeze in the ice-coated water before she had swum a dozen yards, and the shore was a long way off. There was nothing for her to do but to wait there on the little boat.

Then her thoughts turned as they always had, suddenly, absolutely away from the darkness toward the light which her spirit had always known, the joy that made flowers and animals, the sea and sky, and all beauty so dear to her, the joy which came from within and which had always made her contented with her home in the birch forest, satisfied with plain, simple things, the song of birds and the swaying of ice-laden branches, and she felt suddenly

strong and quiet and ready for the help and protection which she knew was there for her. Fear, like the wolf, crept silently away.

Her thoughts flew back to the little Christmas feast in Fru Carlson's flat in Ridderholm, to the warmth and coziness, the spicy odor of pine boughs, and, above all, to the love and friendliness that had surrounded her.

"It is still here," she thought. She could see in her mind's eye the reason for Lari's abducting her. She was sure that there was a pact between Lari, her grandmother, and her father's stepbrother. They wanted a strong, capable girl, one of their own blood, over whom they could dominate, one who could do the rough work in the huts and help to boil down the whale blubber brought from Varlo. Above all, they wanted the money that had been hidden in the tin box under the plank in the little house in the birch forest.

The yot glided steadily into a narrow waterway, hardly more than a pool between great rocks. It was dark now with the all-enveloping darkness of midwinter in the North. It was easy for Guldviva to see the plan of Lari and Sven. They did not dare to anchor their boat near shore. It would never be seen in the black water among black rocks. Guldviva was sure also that they would not stay in Varlo an hour longer than was necessary. There would be a sleigh and dogs waiting. She would be whirled away into the silent, frozen darkness!

Anxious thoughts tried to crowd themselves about her, but she turned from them resolutely and the feeling of confidence which had come did not leave her.

Lari worked steadily and quietly with ropes and anchor. The men knew every inch of their way all through the waterways and about the rocks and they knew the tide. Now and then Lari glanced at Guldviva as she stood motionless by the railing. It was a half hour later that they silently left the boat. It was a perilous landing, deftly accomplished by the two men who had spent most of their lives in and about boats and rocks. Almost before she knew it Guldviva found herself on shore, a wild stretch of ice-covered rocks before her and behind her the towering darkness of a warehouse.

Lari and the Norwegian talked rapidly in Norwegian and Guldviva heard and understood all that they said. They were elated at the success of their plan so far and their only task for the next hour was to wait, concealed in the warehouse, until such time as the men who were to aid them with sleighs and dogs should appear.

Their destination was evidently known to the Lapps who were to aid them. Guldviva gathered from their hurried chatter that one of the men worked in the warehouse and that a certain trapdoor known to them all would be found easy of access.

This proved to be so. One moment they stood shivering in the icy brightness of the night, for the

moon had peered out from its hiding place, the next found themselves in the black chill of a narrow stairway. Lari lighted the way for them with his electric torch and the light showed them a stairway leading upward at the far end of the ill-smelling cellar in which they found themselves.

Another moment or two of climbing and they were on the main floor of the great, dark building. Lari's electric torch showed a vast space of ugliness ahead of them. There were great cracks on either side of the room and they loomed vaguely and darkly in the distance. Lari fumbled in the pocket of his coat and brought out a candle, lighting it with a match which flickered in the wind-swept room. He put the candle upright in some wax on a packing case and it spurted feebly in the shadows.

It was too cold to keep still for very long, but Guldviva felt suddenly very weary. She no longer feared, but the wild voyage, the great cold, and the seeming extremity of her position were beginning to tell on her. She lay down on a pile of sacking, Lari's greatcoat pulled closely about her.

The two men stood near the candle, talking in low tones, stopping every now and then to listen. Once Lari went to a slit in the wall and peered out. Then the two walked up and down, their clumsy tread making a deep sound in the vast room.

Guldviva raised herself on her elbow and watched them. She, too, noticed the slit in the wall, and, as she measured with her eye the distance of the great

room, she knew that she would have time while the two men were walking toward the end of it to run to the slit and look out. She did this in her quick, silent way, caught the side of the wall, and looked out through the slit at the startling whiteness of the world without. She saw only snow and a gray stretch of warehouses and a clump of ice-covered trees. An instant later she was back again under Lari's coat, apparently asleep.

The house in the birch forest came close, Sno Konung seemed very near, she could almost feel his warm body close to her, his comforting purr in her ear. She had seen nothing outside to reassure her except the friendly stars and the snow which she loved, but she felt reassured. Something told her that she was not alone and that she was not forgotten. The feeling had come to her in the boat and it was still with her. She fell asleep there in the cold, dank warehouse and she dreamed of a Christmas tree with a gold star at the top and glad faces all about her.

The *Efterat* sailed boldly into harbor past the dark warehouses three hours after Lari, Sven, and Guldviva had left the yot. They had been able to gain in speed the last day as the storm had abated and were not delayed several hours as the yot had been, waiting for darkness and a stealthy landing.

Jon's impassive, weather-beaten face was caked with ice and his garments wet with half-frozen water. Both he and Nore were wet and cold and

weary, but Nore, at least, was far too excited to notice it. He had one thought, one idea, one great, overwhelming wish, to find Guldviva, and until that feat was accomplished nothing else seemed real or necessary.

They anchored the *Efterat* and then stood uncertainly for a moment on the wind-swept landing. The village lay mostly in darkness, but they made their way at last slowly toward the faint gleam of a light halfway up the dark, ugly street, and, as they had hoped, the light proved to be from a swinging lantern above the door of an inn. They opened the door and went inside. They had found Gamla Hus.

There was no one inside the small entrance but a shock-haired boy, asleep behind a counter. Nore went up to him and shook his arm. The boy awoke, rubbed his eyes, and stood up.

"Is everybody and everything in this wretched town asleep?" Nore burst out angrily, disappointed beyond words at the dead grayness of the town and the inn. No human being anywhere but this blinking boy. It came to Nore suddenly that there would be little or no help from any one in Varlo. It was a lifeless place except in the whale-fishing season. He remembered hearing that the inhabitants seemed always half asleep in winter. The police in Stockholm had telegraphed the news of the disappearance of a girl with a Lapp and a Norwegian and that possibly their destination was Varlo. This was

vague enough; it had evidently caused little or no concern in the far-away seacoast town.

The shock-haired boy gazed wondering at the two who had come in and roused him from his slumber. He rubbed his forehead with his hand and then, turning toward a shelf behind him, fumbled with some papers in one corner and drew out a yellow envelope.

"This came to-day." He scanned the printing on the envelope. "Nore Essen is the name."

"It's mine, give it to me." Nore snatched the envelope from the boy, tore it open, and read Domski's message.

"Lari may land at some inlet along the coast, Varlo. Think he will take shelter in some warehouse and meet his accomplices there. Courage.

DOMSKI."

Nore handed the message to Jon, frowning impatiently as the old seaman pondered it slowly.

"Listen, Jon. You must find out about a sledge and dogs. I'm going to the warehouses."

The color rushed to Nore's face as he spoke and his eyes were like shining steel. His voice shook a little as he spoke to Jon.

"There is no time to lose. I must find out if they are gone. Get the sledge and dogs and pick me up if you can." Nore hesitated, turning suddenly, and putting his hand on Jon's arm.

"If you don't find me you'll know I've found some

way of following them quickly." He turned to the boy behind the counter.

"Are the warehouses all together along the coast?" he asked. He nodded his head in that direction as he spoke.

The boy answered in the affirmative, and before slow-thinking Jon could move or think, Nore had left them, disappearing into the darkness outside.

CHAPTER XX

THE SCARLET SCARF

WHEN Nore reached the street he found it absolutely deserted, but the darkness had gone. A gallant moon rode high and the long, ugly roadway had turned suddenly to silver.

Nore ran swiftly away from the silent town. A few feeble lights glimmered far away and the regular flash of a lighthouse mingled with the moonlight on the sea.

He did not notice the snow or the moonlight or the squalid village. He was dominated by one idea, one desire, and that was to find Guldviva. Not to rescue her—that must come after—but to see her, to know that she was alive, to be rid of the terrible uncertainty about her. This was the thought which was a prayer in his heart.

He ran swiftly through the glorious silver night, his heart full of gratitude for loyal Domski. His message had come just at the moment when it was most needed. It had brought courage and comfort with it. For a moment the thought of the others came to him, Audrey, Stella, Fru Carlson, but it faded, leaving instead the memory of a white forest

whose silvered trees were outlined against a scarlet sky, a girl with a scarlet scarf about her throat, a girl with a calm face and fearless eyes!

The warehouses loomed darkly against the moon-touched sky. It was past midnight. Nore slackened his pace and finally stood still. Then, stepping into the deep shadows cast by the warehouses, he walked cautiously, stopping every now and then to listen.

They were all so alike, these silent, blank, monsterlike buildings, around which, even in the frosty night, a stale odor of whale blubber lingered. There was no sound but the creaking of ice, no sign of any human being; only the dancing of stars above him and the frozen silence under his feet. He stopped at last in the shadows, his eyes alert, his arms at his sides. Above him through a slit in the side of a warehouse a faint light flickered for a moment. It was the light from Lari's electric torch as he and Sven waited in an agony of suspense by the slit. Harth and his companion with sledges and dogs were late. Midnight had struck some half hour before. The night was passing.

Nore waited, a motionless figure, a part of the snow and shadows, his white face lifted, his body taut.

He heard the jangle of bells in the distance even before it reached the strained ears of the two men watching from the warehouse.

The two sledges with their dogs appeared suddenly, almost by magic, out of the starlit whiteness.

"You come now."

Lari repeated the words roughly, going up to Guldviva who stood near. She turned her calm gaze upon him.

"I am not afraid of you, I shall come back," she said, and there was no quiver in her voice. She followed Lari and Sven across the rough floor, and at the top of the steep flight of stairs she turned, looking sideways through the wide slit in the wall. Suddenly it seemed as though her heart had stopped beating. She caught the stair rail, clinging to it silently, her breath coming again instantly. Lari had lumbered on a few steps ahead of her. She turned back to the slit in the wall and, holding her scarlet scarf against the side of it, let it flutter out in the stiff winter breeze. She held it as long as she dared, possibly for half a minute. Then she turned, gathering it quickly into a ball in her hand as Lari reached the last step.

He looked back at her and she ran lightly down, an overwhelming excitement possessing her. She had seen—ah, who was it she had seen? It was Nore.

Thoughts like flying arrows swept her mind as she slowly descended the greasy, rickety stairs, the reeking smell of decayed fish blowing up the stairs to meet her. She had not been mistaken. She had seen Nore, his white jersey, his fair hair, his tense white face. He had been standing some way off and an instant after her eyes had caught the white

flash of his jersey in the darkness, he had stepped back into the shadows.

Nore—but she must have been dreaming. The very thought of him meant courage, trust, a new desire to bring out all of her strength and intelligence, above all to keep her prayer for rescue on her lips and in her heart.

Had he seen the wide flutter of the scarlet scarf through the slit? Had he seen it? Her whole soul seemed to ask the question as she followed Lari through room after room of the dusky, ill-smelling place. The glint of moonlight through the clouds had given her the brief, breath-taking glimpse of Nore, and her whole soul was a prayer as she crept silently behind Lari and waited in the chill dusk while he cautiously slid back the great door.

Stars danced above them in the dark staring blue of the sky. There was no time to think or plan, but Guldviva knew as Lari ran with her across the frozen road that she would have called out if Nore had not seen her, but wonder of wonders he had. She saw him there in the shadow as they came out into the startling air, and for a breathless instant caught the waving of his white scarf.

Nore had seen her and for the moment nothing else mattered to her!

It came and went like a flash, the quick run through the icy air, and the brief muttered greeting between the muffled Lapp drivers of the two sledges. As the men clumsily half lifted her into one of the

sledges Guldviva wondered which of the two Lapps, their wool caps pulled down over their eyebrows, was her father's stepbrother, Harth. She only wondered vaguely. Everything was vague to her and yet oddly clear. The vagueness was like a silver-white dream. The clearness was that, in spite of everything, Nore was there and would somehow, in some way, be near her to help her.

Lari climbed in, seating himself heavily beside her and drawing the great fur robes close about them. Sven sat beside the driver of the other sledge. The dogs pulled restlessly at the reins. Provisions were piled up behind them, and on each side of the sledges were strapped great pieces of hide and fur, which Harth had bargained for along the way and which would form a warm, fresh lining for his hut.

They made broad, bulky sides to the sleighs and were so tightly piled and strapped together that they might almost have made extra accommodation for a passenger. This thought had flashed to Guldviva as she was lifted into the sleigh. It was all-absorbing as she sat there muffled to the ears, while the men muttered explanations and directions.

Nore saw the piled-up hides and furs strapped to the sides of the sledge and his eyes blazed there in the darkness. There was a white bearskin fastened on top of the pile next to Guldviva. His own thick wool-lined jersey was white, so were his gloves and cap.

Noiselessly, swiftly he crept close. Harth had

gathered the reins in his hand. Swiftly, silently Nore crouched by the sleigh and the next moment threw himself, face down, on the white bear fur.

They were off! They slid through the snow-silenced streets where squat, ugly houses seemed to leer down at them. The bitter air swept across them, the wind shrieked behind them.

Guldviva sat as motionless as a frozen snow woman. Her hands in their clumsy gloves were clenched under the heavy robes, her eyes stared straight before her and the prayer in her heart was something like this:

"Love that has brought us so far and that is keeping Nore close beside me, be with him through the night so that frost cannot harm him, so that sleep cannot overtake him, bringing danger, so that the blessed morning sunshine will find us free!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE NIGHT RIDE

GULDVIVA said years afterward that her life had been divided into two parts, the time before the sledge ride north and the time afterward.

"I think it was as though I suddenly found paradise," she said once afterward to Stella. "I was alone with enemies in a dark, strange place. Then suddenly all was white and silver, the sweet air, the stars, and close beside me, riding with me through the night, was Nore."

Nore clung to the pile of skins. He pulled his cap down close over his face and buried his head in his arms. There was no sound except the faint jangle of the bells on the dog's harnesses and the whistling of the wind. He knew that if he should turn sideways a little he could touch Guldviva.

He waited for a long time, lying prone upon the soft fur. Then he turned so that he could touch her arm. After a few minutes she returned the touch. It was comforting to both of them. Thoughts crowded thickly into their minds. Guldviva, although in the midst of peril, was touched by exaltation. Her love for the sea had stood by her well on the wild voyage in the little boat, and

her love for the snow and stars, for moonlight and air, was with her now on this wild ride through the night. Although a net seemed to be closing about her, one which she herself could not disentangle, confidence filled her heart, and a great wave of gratitude swept over her. This boy in spite of his art and his noble heritage, or perhaps partly because of both, was her friend, and was proving his friendship at the risk of his life.

Her lips breathed a prayer for him. She felt strong both for herself and for him. She had not felt helpless even when she had been a prisoner in a tiny boat at sea. Something told her that Nore had more than done his part and that she must help him now in any way she could. She held herself erect under the heavy coverings, her eyes alert, her thoughts very clear.

Nore closed his eyes, burying his face deep into the welcome warmth. Thoughts seemed to whirl about him, plans came and went, each more impossible than the one before. One moment he was with the party in the castle on the rocks, making taffy over the kitchen fire or roaming through the great rooms, up the narrow stairway to the tower with Audrey beside him, the others following in a laughing group. The next moment his thought was with slow-moving Jon in Varlo. Jon would find a sledge and dogs and would follow hot upon their trail. There was no doubt of that.

Some way, somehow he would bring Guldviva

safely back again. The joy of the thought brought a warm wave of courage, and when Guldviva whispered, "Do not sleep," he whispered back cheerfully:

"Not I; I never was more wide awake."

The long night wore on as they sped through a white, sleeping world. Nore was right when he had whispered that he was wide awake. His thought was alert, keen, his whole being alive to the necessity of keeping calm and quiet and ready at a moment to act, and to act wisely.

Jon, after Nore had left him so suddenly, disappearing into the night, stood for some time absorbed in thought in the tiny ill-lighted entry hall of the ugly little inn. He must find a sleigh and dogs and he must not waste time.

The shock-haired boy behind the counter was uncommunicative. He had seen no girl who looked as though she might be a prisoner of a Lapp. Yes, there were Lapps about, any number of them, but what of that!

He admitted that his uncle traded north and had a sledge and dogs. Also that he was at home with a chest cold, and that there would be no use of disturbing him in the middle of the night, because he most certainly would not arouse himself and oblige any one, were he the god Odin, himself, by driving them north.

Jon was slow-thinking, but there were times when he could move quickly. One time was the night

when Nore had dashed into his cottage and told him that Lari had carried off Guldviva. This was another time. Before he could act or think Petrus, the shock-haired boy at Gamla Hus, found himself walking briskly through the night with Jon to his uncle's house, and pounding on the heavy wooden door to awaken the household.

A half hour later Jon was seated in a sledge, and Petrus, muffled in shawls and furs, sat beside him. It had all happened so quickly that both of them, slow-thinking as they were, hardly knew what had happened. Jon's money and his story had combined to open the heart of "Uncle" and he had given over the sledge and dogs, ordering Petrus to harness them and also to accompany Jon. Nore had divided the money he had brought with him between himself and Jon.

"If we are separated we will both need money. It will help us," he had said.

It was the money that he and Domski had taken with them from Paris.

"Petrus knows the country up yonder. He can show you the route they will be likely to take," the uncle explained hoarsely.

"You'll have to ride on the sides in case the young gentleman is waiting up by the warehouses. If he found track of them some way and has gone on we'll have to be swift to overtake 'em," Jon said to the boy as they sped along the dark streets toward the great buildings on the outskirts of the town.

The boy replied by a grunt, his placid, piglike face buried deep in a fur cape of his uncle's. At no time did it matter very much to him what he did, but he was used to obeying his uncle and enough in awe of him to follow his directions.

"You're dumb-headed; you know these Lapps pretty well and you know their ways. You've traveled that direction with me many a time when it's been colder than now. You see if you can trace that Lapp and his evil mates."

This parting injunction of his uncle's was with Petrus as he guided the dogs through the town. He obeyed Jon's command to stop near the warehouses and waited while the old seaman crept silently along their shadowed sides. Jon came up to the sleigh at last and stood for a moment in thought.

"They've come and gone. There are footprints from the third warehouse toward the road and there are the marks of a sleigh and of dogs' feet. They're gone and some way that boy's gone with them. I'm sure of it. We'll follow hard after."

He scrambled heavily into the sleigh, seating himself beside Petrus, and the next moment they were off like the wind, sweeping past icy spaces, across narrow, frozen bridges, away from the dark, miserable little town, on and on, the dogs alert and fresh, the fat boy, driving them, quite awake to his duty, and in the heart of old Jon love and courage,

and an odd kind of faith that somehow, some way, all would be well.

He was surprised that he did feel this way about it all, since it was his habit as a rule to look upon the darkest side of things. Now not only was he happily determined to find and bring back both Guldviva and Nore, but with the determination came a thrill of excitement that he had never before experienced in all his sixty years.

The footprints in the snow and the ridges made by the sledges were good proof to him that the Lapps, with Guldviva as their prisoner, were well on their way. He had no actual proof that Nore had gone with them, but he did not doubt for a moment that he had done so. Nore must have run straight to the warehouse from the inn. He would have discovered the foot and sledge prints at once in the bright moonlight and would have returned at once to the inn for a sledge and dogs. But he had not done so. No, Nore had hidden, waiting until Guldviva and the men came, and somehow, perhaps as a prisoner, he had gone with them or had found some means of following them.

"Where are we going, how can we tell the right way?" Jon said finally to Petrus, after they had seemingly flown for hours through the icy stillness.

"Them Lapps make for woods. They'll change dogs by early morning. They always do. There ain't many halfway places and this truck will keep clear of the farms and make for woods. You bet

you I'm right. There's some huts along a good way farther on, real Lapps live there. They ain't too friendly. We'll make for their part of the country. That truck is just their kind. You bet you will find trace of 'em there!" Petrus answered, and it was the longest speech he had ever made in his life, or probably ever would make. He was proud of it and indeed was showing himself to be far wiser than he had seemed on first acquaintance.

"We'll need some contriving to get near them and to find the others," Jon muttered, his face blue with cold and his grizzly beard stiff with ice.

"Oh, when we get within some miles of 'em we'll go slow," Petrus answered, a slow grin wreathing his red face.

"You bet you," Jon answered with a chuckle, and so, on through the stark, frozen, moonlit wonderland, the two, suddenly become good cronies, drove, and the stars laughed down at them.

CHAPTER XXII

WHILE MEN SLEPT

DAWN turned the frozen wastelands to gold; ice-covered pools gleamed scarlet. The long silver night was gone and the day dawned rosily.

Guldviva, in spite of the drowsiness which came over her toward dawn, did not sleep. She sat huddled under the heavy covering, her shining eyes gazing straight in front of her. Nore watched her, his head turned sideways on his arm. He thought again how unusual a girl she was. Suddenly Nore wanted intensely to be in the icy birch forest again with Guldviva, the castle on the rocks near by and all the old familiar things and people within reach. Instead there was space and silence and before them soon some need for action and for calm with which to face danger.

Guldviva, too, was thinking of the birch forest, of the castle on the rocks, of the two American girls, especially of Nore's cousin Audrey who had so generously included her in the house party. Audrey who was so pretty and full of life, so vital and delightful. What must they all be thinking, what wonder and anxiety must be theirs with Nore off

on a stormy sea and no news of him or of her! It was all strange, absorbing; it was like a dream, the unearthly beauty of the morning, the flight from Varlo!

Suddenly the driver of the sledge turned around and spoke to Lari. He was muffled in a heavy cloak of ice-coated hides. His small eyes just peered above its collar. Guldviva was sure that he was Harth, her father's stepbrother. He spoke hoarsely in the Lapp language and Lari answered him in the same tongue. Then Lari turned quickly and spoke across to Sven, in Norwegian, and at once both Guldviva and Nore were straining every nerve to hear what it was that he said.

The other sledge was close beside them and the dogs had been pulled into a slow trot. The wind had died and Lari's words carried easily.

"We'll rest in some huts where dwell people Harth knows. There will be no fresh dogs until we reach the frozen swampland that's a day's journey on. We are to rest the dogs some hours at the huts and start on in the afternoon."

Nore bit the fur rug under his face in sudden fierce excitement. Guldviva sat as always, motionless, impassive, gazing straight before her. Her eyes were calm.

Nore thought clearly, lying there motionless, his white-clad figure deeply buried in the white furs. He knew that he must watch his chance to slip off the sledge into the snow, when they neared the

huts which were to be their destination for a few hours. He must hide somewhere in or near the huts; and then whatever was the right thing to do, somehow must be done!

Sheets of frozen water gleamed like sapphires in the barren wastelands. The rose in the east faded to pale orange and the sudden flight of some wild black geese, startled at their approach, made dark silhouettes against the primrose sky. The dogs' pace had slowed down almost to a walk. There was the gray outline of a wood in the distance and as they approached it they saw smoke curling up from the midst of its silvered trees. The sledges turned in at a lanelike road, bumping over clumps of frozen stubble and dipping into deep ruts.

Nore watched his chance, and as they neared the wood he slipped noiselessly off the sledge, lying motionless, a white figure in the snow until the sleigh was lost to sight as it turned into a woodland path.

He crept after it on his hands and knees, running finally when he reached the shelter of the wood. He could hear the jangle of the dogs' bells and then the hoarse, rough voices of the Lapps in the huts near by, greeting the weary travelers.

He stood still in the somber quiet of the wood, trying as best he could to think of some way, some plan. It was startlingly cold and his limbs ached from the cramped position they had been in all

through the long night's ride. He was hungry, too, and putting his hand deep in the pocket of a gray wool vest under his heavy white jersey, he drew out a packet and, opening it, ate a sandwich of hard gray bread and goat's cheese. The cheese was frozen, but was none the less appetizing to him for the moment.

After he had eaten he felt better and suddenly a thought came to him. He crept quickly nearer to the hut and watched from the shelter of a clump of trees while Lari and Harth unhitched the dogs and led them around the corner of the huts. There would be an outhouse at the back and it was there, of course, that the dogs would be sheltered, left to rest after being fed.

The thought that came to Nore as he stood there in the bleak wood, half frozen and weary, was this. He must manage somehow to steal the dogs from the outhouse, harness them again to one of the sledges, and drive off with Guldviva. He smiled a little wanly to himself at the idea. It was a plan that seemed beyond possibility to accomplish.

He made his way noiselessly through the wood, circling the huts, and reaching finally a dark corner in the dogs' shelter. He lay down on a heap of skins and blankets in the corner and closed his eyes, sitting up the next moment and shaking his head vigorously. He must not sleep. He waited for what he thought was a half hour or more and then crept out again, gliding along by the sides of the

ugly wooden huts. These huts, the kind occupied by more civilized Lapps who carried on a trade of skins and furs with Norway and Sweden, were quite different from the fur-lined tents farther north, the home of Harth and Guldviva's grandmother.

Within the larger of the two huts a fire made of faggots burned brightly, the ugly little room was full of smoke and the odor of burnt coffee, and the men sat about on the floor or on low benches, drinking the dark, ill-smelling mixture out of tin cups. The coffee was made of grain and burned black in the process of cooking it.

The owners of the huts were three men who made a living by trapping and dressing skins for sale in Varlo and by occasional bouts of cattle stealing, selling the animals at a good profit to their neighbors farther north. There was no woman in the ménage, the men cooking their own food and seldom or never troubling themselves to make their abode clean or presentable.

Guldviva sat by the window of the squalid room, her hands clasped on her lap, her eyes gazing out through the cracked windowpane. She had sat that way ever since they had entered the hut, except for the few minutes when she had drawn close to the fire for warmth and had drunk a cup of the steaming coffee and eaten some bread and dried reindeer meat.

She sat as close to the window as she could, her scarlet scarf twisted about her throat, her heavy

coat still wrapped about her. She knew that Nore would try to communicate with her and she wanted him to catch a glimpse of the scarlet scarf. The hot drink had revived her.

Nore saw her and came close to the window. The sun was blazing now and some of the frost had melted and was dripping. Guldviva leaned her head against the windowpane, closing her eyes as though spent with weariness, and, straining her ears, heard Nore say these words:

"I am taking the dogs and a sledge. The hut men will be going out soon, I think. The others will sleep. Be ready at any time."

Guldviva still sat apparently asleep, her head against the rough wall, and Nore stole back silently to the outhouse where the dogs were sheltered.

Nore had guessed truly that the owners of the hut would not spend a dry sunny afternoon by their fire, also that the men, Lari and Harth, Sven and the driver of the other sledge, would sleep from sheer exhaustion. They lay stretched out in front of the fire, their wool caps pulled down over their eyes, their heavy breathing filling the little room. They slept in utter abandonment and without a fear. Lari was absolutely assured that all was well and that there was no longer any cause for anxiety as to their being pursued. The tin box containing the money lay beside him. It gleamed in the firelight, only one side of it showing from under his fur coat. He and Harth would take good care

that it reached its destination in the North safely, and then he, Lari, would see that there was a just halving of its contents. Lari had not seen Stella in her wild flight through the birch forest when she found Guldviva missing!

He knew nothing of Domski's careful searching of his room above the stable and of his message to Nore at Varlo. Most important of all, he knew nothing at all of Nore, and he slept the sleep of cold and exhaustion as did his comrades beside him.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE FLIGHT

THE dogs were huddled together for warmth in a corner of the outhouse. Nore stood looking down at them, his gauntleted hands deep in the pockets of his jersey. The dogs were tired out, he knew. They were not unharnessed. They were hardy and wiry and used to hard going through wild places. It would not be at all impossible to rouse them. They were probably bred in Varlo. Jon had said it was a breeding place for Lapp dogs. In that case they would not be averse to traveling toward home.

Nore took out his pocketknife and went quietly from one sleeping dog to the other, cutting off the bells that hung from their harnesses. They only stirred and growled faintly in their sleep. He laid the bells in a glittering heap on a barrel, and then with some difficulty and very cautiously, he opened the wide door of the shelter. He guessed that the moving out of the sledge would probably be a sign to the dogs that a start was to be made, and this proved to be so, for as he slowly pushed the outer one toward the door, the dogs moved uneasily and

two of them rose to their feet, one giving several short barks.

Nore knew that their barking would be the danger, the one thing that might wake the men so deeply asleep by the fire, but, on the other hand, he hoped that the bark had been a signal for Guld-viva, and this proved to be the case.

She had been waiting her time, fastening the heavy cloak closely about her and drawing on the wool cap and heavy gloves Lari had given her. Leaving her seat, she crossed noiselessly to the fireplace, the snoring of the sleeping men covering any faint sound she might have made. She knelt by Lari's side and lifted the tin box from under his coat. She had watched it shining out from the dark cloth while she had been sitting by the window. It was heavy and clumsy, but she was very strong.

She lifted the box and crept away with it, laying it on the floor while she opened the door. She did not dare to look back, but lifted the box again, slipped out of the door, closed it as gently as she could behind her, and stood for a moment on the snowy threshold, listening, her heart pounding and a ringing in her ears. There was no sound from within, and she ran quickly around the corner of the hut, the box clasped tightly in both hands.

It seemed to Guldviva, as she ran swiftly through the glittering sunshine, as though it was a very long way to the dog shelter and as though her legs were too heavy to carry her so far. A wind had arisen

as the sun had come out and a snow-laden blast swept around her.

Nore had dragged out the sledge which made no sound on the snow. He motioned her with a quick gesture to get in, and he called the dogs softly. They came unwillingly at first, but once in the sparkling air the sight of the sledge seemed to excite them and they all began barking at once!

Nore sprang into the sledge, cracked the whip, and they were off, bumping over the rough ground, the icy wind roaring about them. Neither of them looked back, neither spoke. The thoughts of both of them leaped ahead to the glittering white world before them, a wild whirl through frosty places, then safety, comfort, protection, and the old life which seemed so glorious, waiting for them at their journey's end!

Something flashed past them, vanishing into the snow, and through the whistling of the wind they faintly heard shouting. The barking of the dogs had wakened Lari and Harth and the shots were from their rifles. Nore turned with a quick smile to Guldviva.

"I took all the dogs," he whispered breathlessly.

"Yes—wonderful," she answered, catching her breath, her eyes luminous, her hands clasped at her throat. Suddenly she laughed out joyously. "Wonderful," she repeated. "You took all the dogs. It was clever, it was beautiful, all the dogs."

Nore glanced at her a little fearfully. Guldviva was a wonderful girl, but she had been under a terrible strain. He put out his arm and held her for a moment, leaning toward her.

"That's a good girl, now just hold on, we're on our way home," he whispered, and suddenly comforted she smiled up at him, speaking in her usual quiet way.

"Yes, we are on our way home and all is well," she said.

The cold was less than it had been in the night and the sunshine made a golden world. The dogs knew the way and with eight of them instead of four to draw the sledge they made quick progress, but it was a long, cold, tedious way and they had had little food and no sleep. Nore's arms and legs ached unmercifully after his cramped position during the night, his head swam, spots of red and purple danced before his eyes, a sudden fear gripped him. Was snow blindness coming on him? He turned to Guldviva.

"I can't see so well," he said.

Her answer came back clearly, joyously:

"Light is greater than darkness; it is showing us the way."

It was the old Guldviva who spoke, calm, poised, confident, and as she spoke Nore realized with a great rush of gratitude all the good that had been with them through fear and darkness and danger, and he answered in kind:

"Yes, it's been with us all the way."

The world was clear and white again, and coming toward them through the white wasteland beyond was something dark, something that moved swiftly and after a moment proved to be a sledge and dogs. Some one shouted and Nore knew the voice. He waved his arm and shouted back.

"It's Jon, he's come after us. It's Jon," he exclaimed. There was a loud welcome from the dogs, quick, loud replies back and forth from each sleigh, laughter, and from Guldviva suddenly there were sobs. The relief and joy of seeing Jon, whom she had known since she was a baby, was too much for her.

"Oh, Jon, Jon," she sobbed, "I want to go back to my home in the birch forest."

It was only for a moment that she wept, then she smiled joyously through her tears.

"I am like a baby—am I not?—but my tears are tears of joy," she said. Then she looked back for a moment over her shoulder.

"We must not delay. They may come after us," she said.

Although there was little or no chance of such a thing being possible, as Nore had taken all the dogs, both Jon and Nore made plans at once. There were only a few hours before the early twilight would set in and they must make the best of them.

Petrus sat still in the sledge, his broad, red face

as placid as ever. Suddenly he leaned forward and spoke.

"The schooner *Hydosh* calls at Varlo to-day to pick up cargo, she's on her way to Stockholm and she's a fair-sized boat. You'd do well by yourselves to board her and go home," he announced.

"That's good," put in Jon. "You and I, Petrus, will take the other sledge now and let the young people travel with the fresh dogs. We must turn back at once, darkness will fall."

They made the exchange and were off again like a flash with no more time wasted in speech. Nore laughed aloud for sheer delight as they sped on toward Varlo.

"How like Jon it was not to ask any questions or show any curiosity," he exclaimed.

Guldviva did not answer and he turned to look at her. She was fast asleep, her head sideways against the cushion of the sledge. She slept until they came within sight of Varlo, when the barking of the dogs awakened her. She sat up with a start, clutching Nore's arm. He smiled at her reassuringly.

"We're almost at Varlo and that means we're on our way home," he said quietly.

There was a welcome for them at Gamla Hus, hot fires and steaming coffee, brown bread and goats' cheese and boiled venison steak. As soon as they had warmed themselves by the fire at Gamla Hus they sent a telegram to their anxious friends, at the

castle, informing them of their safe arrival at Varlo and that they expected to be home shortly.

The landlord was better of his cold and bustled about ordering Petrus here and there, a huge red woolen muffler wound about his throat. He beamed when Guldviva, Nore, and Jon praised his nephew, Petrus, and the lad himself blushed crimson.

Jon was in the best of spirits, rejoicing in having outwitted the Lapps and in the fact that Guldviva and Nore were safe.

"They'll be like madmen, that Lari and that Harth. There they are with no dogs and the first hamlet beyond them fifteen miles off," chuckled Jon. He was far more talkative than either Guldviva or Nore. The reaction had set in with them and they ate and drank in silence, falling asleep in their chairs.

The captain of the good boat *Hydosh* shared their coffee and venison steak, glad himself of a brief respite from his boat and the sea. He was interested in their story and adventure as told by Jon, and only too glad to take them on board next day as passengers.

Jon himself would not hear of going with them. He had come in the *Efterat* and he meant to return in her, and nothing would have persuaded him to leave her behind at Varlo. Nore was determined to go back with him in the good little craft which had brought them so gallantly to Varlo, but this the obstinate Swede would not hear of.

"I've a comrade here I'm having a bit of a deal with. I've had letters from him. He's a whale man and he wants to see Stockholm. I'm going to take him along and maybe this Petrus here, as ballast," Jon said jovially but determinedly at supper.

"You two go on ahead in the big boat and tell them I'm coming," he said.

They sailed away early in the afternoon of the next day. The early sun was just gilding the roofs of the drab little town as they glided out of the harbor. Guldviva and Nore stood side by side on the deck of the fishing schooner.

"We're going home, Nore. You came and saved me," she said simply.

Nore laughed out in the clear, dancing sunshine.

"It was the scarlet scarf that did it," he said joyously.

CHAPTER XXIV

VALFRIED'S WELCOME

"PLEASE go, all of you; I simply don't want to roam about anywhere this afternoon. I'm not athletic really and it doesn't make me worry any less about Nore and Guldviva when I'm freezing out in the woods, than it does when I'm comfortably here by the fire."

Valfried spoke over her shoulder to Audrey and Stella, who were making ready for an afternoon in the woods. The boys' voices sounded from below and Bjorn called out:

"Hurry, girls, you are as slow as—molasses in winter."

Audrey laughed.

"I didn't think I could laugh again until—well, until we know they're safe, but wasn't it funny Bjorn's remembering that expression of Sven's? Oh, dear, Val, why don't you come out? How can you stay in and mope?"

There was a little choke in Audrey's voice over the last words. Stella, looking like a brown bird in her big coat and fur cap, put her arm around Audrey, and they stood for a moment gazing wist-

fully off at the snow-covered rocks and the quiet gray sky outside.

"I don't intend to mope at all, I'm going to read a book Stella loaned me. Don't be late and do let us try and have a more cheerful evening than last night, we girls acted so stupidly, and the boys were as glum as tombstones."

The door closed on Valfried's last words. She drew her fur cape close about her shoulders, put her slim feet up on the fender of the kakelugn, and began to read. There was no one around except Marta, who was cutting some bread for her mother in the kitchen. Fru Carlson had gone down the shore path to see Jon's sister.

Valfried sat with her book unheeded in her lap, her thoughts busy with a dozen different worries, plans, and conjectures. She knew that the girls had gone out with Bjorn and Nils because they were too restless to stay in the house. Fru Carlson had sent a wire at once to the Paris address of Nore's Uncle Eugene, but probably no one would know where to forward it now that Nore had gone. It was possible, if he were not traveling in some far-away place, that he had had no news of his nephew since before Christmas.

Audrey's Tante Greta had written worried notes from the sanitarium, and Audrey had promised to go to her as soon as Nore came back.

"She won't like that," Valfried thought to herself moodily. "Audrey likes the limelight. Well,

so do I. She likes to be in the midst of excitement, adventures. This waiting for news is a hard time for her. She'll find it tame, though, going down to the sanitarium to see her aunt."

The telephone rang sharply. Valfried let her book fall to the floor and ran to it, lifting the receiver.

"Yes, hullo," she said impatiently.

"A telegram," came the reply. "I'll repeat it."

"Nore Essen, Guldviva Jolf safe with us. Reach palace pier evening.

"Schooner *Hydosh*."

The words sang themselves over and over. Valfried knew that her eyes were blinded by the tears which ran down her cheeks, knew somehow that she wrote down the message, and then found herself sobbing her heart out, her head leaning on her arms on the dining-room table.

She would never have believed it if any one had told her earlier in the winter that she could ever be so grateful, so deeply thankful about anything, and that her gratitude could take so emotional a form.

She thought quickly even as she sat sobbing by the table. It was nearly five o'clock. The others would not be back for an hour, and there was no way of finding them. There was a train at half-past five. There was only one thing to do, and that was to leave the wonderful news with Marta

and Thure, go to Stockholm alone, and do whatever she could to help. There was no later train to the city and therefore no way for the others to come in, for even if they might hire a motor at Boo it could not possibly traverse the heavy snow. She herself must go to Stockholm to do what she could for Guldviva and Nore.

She ran upstairs for her gloves and purse and called out to Marta as she ran down again:

"Marta!"

Her voice rang clearly through the great hall and as Marta came out from the kitchen Valfried cried jubilantly:

"They're safe, a message from a schooner says the *Efteråt* people are safe, Marta. Isn't it joyful—joyful!"

Valfried caught hold of Marta just in time, remembering with the new thoughtfulness which seemed to have come to her that Nore was dearer to Marta than almost any one in the world.

"Nore's safe—and Guldviva!" Marta stammered the exclamation, the color coming back to her cheeks.

"They are safe, I'm going to Stockholm, they reach the palace dock this evening. I shall take them home with me. Lillemore must be there, she was to arrive back this afternoon. Marta, I'll leave you to tell them the great news and I will telephone as soon as I know anything further."

While she was speaking, Valfried slipped into her great fur coat and then twisted a blue silk scarf

about her throat. She patted Marta's shoulder, the tears coming to her eyes again as Marta sobbed in relief and joy. Then like a flash she was out of the castle and down the rocks.

The hour's train journey seemed a year and she welcomed the glowing rose and gold lights of Stockholm. She boarded a ferry at the foot of the palace steps and was soon walking briskly toward Strandvagen, the sparkle and laughter of happy afternoon crowds all about her. She had the key to the house in her pocket and meant to telephone to Lillemore, who was staying with a friend, as soon as she reached home.

Some one was trudging through the snow, her skirts held well up about her knees, some one whose broad purplish face beamed cheerfully from under a round black bonnet which was too small for the rest of her. It was Lillemore!

Valfried threw herself upon her old nurse, hugging her.

"I never was so glad to see any one before, Lillemore. It's gorgeous meeting you like this. They're on their way home. A schooner is bringing them."

Valfried spoke all in one breath and then had to repeat all she said slowly, as Lillemore was so surprised at seeing her that she became confused.

"There's no one home but me. I don't hold with gadding, and something told me to shorten my visit

with Greta Carlson and come home. No knowing what may turn up, I said to myself."

Lillemore puffed as she spoke, unable to keep up with Valfried's brisk steps.

"You did just the right thing, Lillemore; you're always to be depended on and just the one person in the world I'm glad to see to-night. The message said they'd arrive at the foot of the palace some time this evening. They will come to us for the night, and what a welcome we will give them. Isn't it wonderful? It's all so utterly romantic and thrilling."

"Hot-water jars for the beds, the extra blankets to be aired, hot soup to make, coffee bread to bake," muttered Lillemore, her mind more occupied with household details than the adventure of greeting the two who had been through peril and come safely home.

They found the rooms bleak and cold when they reached the house in Strandvagen, the family and servants having gone to the country, but Valfried was as full of energy as Lillemore, and to that good woman's amusement, ran here and there, her arms filled with sheets and pillowcases. She helped Lillemore build roaring fires in the great kakelugns and put blankets in front of them to warm. She dashed out to a near-by florist's and bought some expensive roses, putting them in vases about the rooms. Then she asked Lillemore if there was anything more she could do.

Lillemore stood still in the center of one of the guest rooms, the end of a sheet between her teeth.

"Well of all days and ways, well—you, Froken Valfried, what has come over you? I never would have thought it, and yet," Lillemore considered thoughtfully, "I always did say you'd do anything you had a mind to."

"All right, Lillemore, don't stand there staring like a monument. I'm going down to the wharf. Think of it, Lillemore, they're safe. You can't know how I've worried and—and the way I've felt."

Valfried wiped her eyes with a wisp of a rose-colored handkerchief and, going over to the window, stood looking out as Lillemore bustled here and there.

It was true that no one did realize all that Valfried had suffered during the past days, for remorse was mingled with her anxiety. She had longed unspeakably to be able in some way to atone, as she explained it to herself, to Guldviva for past coldness and indifference. Now the opportunity had come to her and she was excited and happy and grateful.

She would be able straight away to offer warmth and loving welcome and hospitality to the two weary adventurers. There was nothing she would not do for them. She was radiant at the thought of being more or less the center of the little drama, but this was not the only emotion that filled her heart. She

was grateful that in some small way she could show her love for Guldviva.

She slipped on her fur coat, small hat, and blue scarf, and then went to find Lillemore in the kitchen. The old nurse was a splendid cook and was herself delighted at being able to help Valfried to prepare a welcome.

"Now, Lillemore, don't begin to fuss and say I ought not to go down there to the boat alone in the dark or any nonsense like that. I must go and you know it, and you must stay here. Now don't begin to rave. I'll bring them back in a taxi as soon as they land, but I don't know when that will be."

Valfried gave Lillemore a hug and ran out of the shining, cozy kitchen before that good woman could speak. Valfried could hear the nurse calling after her, but she ran on. Darkness spangled with gold lights greeted her and the warmth and life and color of a Stockholm winter twilight was all about her. She walked quickly across the frozen harbor which separated Strandvagen from another island of the city. People were skating near by and the brilliant melody of a Russian waltz played by a band near by sounded gayly in the crisp air.

Valfried decided to walk to Gustaf Adolph's Torg and take a taxi across the bridge to the boat landing at the foot of the palace.

When she reached the wharf she was one of a small group of people also waiting for the *Hydosh*

to arrive and she stood a little apart, the sweet, cold breeze from the sea blowing in her face. Across the dark sound a thousand lights gleamed and here and there, pushing through the ice, brightly lighted ferries made their way from one island of the city to another.

As she stood there waiting with the small crowd of people, mostly fisher folk, Valfried thought of all that happened since that early December afternoon when she had told Bjorn she was tired of nothing ever happening. It was that same afternoon that she had seen Audrey from the droska window, and so much, so much had come into her life since then. Audrey and Stella, the sudden appearance of Nore for Christmas, the fascinating house party in the castle on the rocks—all these had come. Then suddenly, unbelievably, the abduction of Guldviva from her home in the birch forest, Nore's going to the rescue, and the news of their safety.

A boat came gliding slowly up the harbor as quietly as though it had not been battling with the angry Baltic sea for two days, and there on the deck, side by side, Nore in his jersey, now travel-stained and dingy, and Guldviva in Lari the Lapp's heavy coat, the scarlet scarf about her throat.

As the boat glided to the wharf they both saw Valfried and, leaning forward, waved their hands to her.

CHAPTER XXV

ALL TOGETHER AGAIN

It was a happy night, the very stars seemed to laugh down at the three, as they stood there, an excited little group on the dark landing, the lights from the palace shining down on them.

"It's only I, Valfried," she had exclaimed when she ran forward to welcome them. "It's only I. Don't be too disappointed not seeing the others. We've such a welcome for you, Lillemore and I, and oh, it makes me so unutterably happy just to be able to do some little thing!"

Valfried spoke spontaneously, a half sob in her voice, and from that moment she had for all time the friendship of Nore and Guldviva.

"We didn't talk very much—you didn't miss so much in that way," Valfried said to the others later; all of the house party, except the Carlsons, had caught a morning train and arrived at the house in Strandvagen for breakfast. There had been no wild welcome. The boy and girl had been through so much they had only wanted to rest, surrounded by Valfried's hospitality.

It was true. Nore and Guldviva had been very

quiet. The three had had a little supper in Valfried's cozy sitting room, and then Lillemore had hurried the two travelers, who were too tired to do more than drowse by the fire, off to bed.

"We knew that we had found a friend and that all was well with us, and we had no other thought but sleep," Guldviva explained, as she sat sipping fragrant coffee with Stella's arm about her, and Audrey, flushed and excited, gazing at her from the other side of the table.

There was such a confusion of voices during the rest of the meal, after they had assured Guldviva that Sno Konung was safe with Hjalmar, so much laughter and banter back and forth, that one would never have realized the depths of anxiety into which some of the party had been thrown, and through what dire peril two of them had come, and yet it was back of everything they said and did and they all felt it.

Guldviva wore a gray skirt and jumper of Valfried's, glad indeed to have fresh clothing. She wore the scarlet scarf about her shoulders, and to her and to Nore it seemed a symbol of their friendship, their adventure, and their safe return.

"Isn't it wonderful that you thought of Varlo as being the place they would sail for, and isn't it thrilling beyond words—all of it?"

Audrey said this last in her usual impulsive way, her eyes like stars. Now that her anxiety was over, the adventure of the whole occurrence was over-

whelming. She had a hundred questions to ask, her cheeks burning with excitement. It was exasperating to her that the two adventurers were so quiet. It was true that neither Nore nor Guldviva were very talkative at any time, and both of them were a little dazed, the reaction of all that they had endured, the great cold, the wild sea, the rough ride through the night in the far North were over. They had come safely through.

It was Guldviva, usually so silent, who told them most of what had occurred in Varlo and beyond it.

"When I saw Nore there in the snow, in the shadow, white like the snow, I cannot tell in words the gratitude that filled me. It was as though I had known it would be so—do you all understand?" Guldviva looked from one to the other of the eager faces turned toward her at the breakfast table.

"You knew Nore would find you. We all knew it," put in Stella, forgetting to be shy, forgetting herself utterly as the wonder of it all swept over her.

"Yes, I knew that he would come," Guldviva answered simply.

"You weren't afraid?"

It was Donski who put the question, leaning forward, a shock of dark hair falling across his forehead.

"No," Guldviva answered, again simply, "I was not afraid."

Domski regarded her for a moment in silence. His usually white face was slightly pink, his eyes luminous. Then he looked about them all—sturdy Bjorn, still half sulky at having had no part in the rescue, and trying to conceal it, but honestly glad over the safe return of them both; Nils Wicander, who seemed to have eyes only for Valfried and who seemed in some way to consider her the heroine of the occasion; Audrey Bradford, radiant, sparkling; Stella West, the quiet girl, who yet somehow seemed at one with them all; Marta, shy too, but overjoyed; Valfried Zander, softened; and Guldviva and Nore, both quiet, both with joy shining in their eyes.

The color deepened in Domski's cheeks as he leaned forward, his chin on his elbow.

"I should like to give a party to you all. It is to be in a small old place where I sometimes wait with Master Eugene. It will give me honor and a great joy if you will all come to the supper party which I wish to give in honor of the safe return."

Domski bowed slightly as he finished speaking, his scraggy black locks entirely covering his face. He threw them back, his face lighting with pleasure at the eager acceptances which poured in on him from every side. There had been just a moment of surprised silence and then eager voices thanking him.

Nore was not as surprised as the others. He knew Domski better than they did, and he appre-

ciated the dignity, fastidiousness which lay beneath his odd make-up and his bohemian ways.

"It was Domski, after all, who found Guldviva. It was he who discovered the plan about the warehouses and who wired me," said Nore, but he was interrupted again by questions on all sides.

"How did it seem to be lying all night in the rugs, traveling in the sledge?" asked Bjorn.

"What did you think of while you were harnessing the dogs?" demanded Audrey.

"Do stop asking questions, all of you. Nore and Guldviva don't want to talk about it now. It's—it's too big."

It was Stella who spoke, and Nore turned to her quickly.

"That's true. I can't tell why exactly, but it is hard to tell about it all, yet. It all seems so close and yet so far away. I'm glad we had it, all of it, after we came together, but—let's go coasting!" he added, with his rare smile.

Later in the day, after a jolly hour of coasting, Nore went to the station to meet his mother and the family who had stayed to attend to some last things. He had gone with them to the flat in Ridderholm, and then at last he had time for quiet speech with Guldviva. They had gone out for a walk together after coffee. He was very white, and Guldviva looked at him with concern.

"You are tired. It is all over now, and things

are beginning to worry you—your uncle, perhaps, and——”

Nore interrupted her.

“No. Uncle Eugene doesn’t worry about me, so why should I about him? He is as happy as a meadow lark, wandering somewhere. He doesn’t mind in the least what I do. He believes in people having experiences, says they help to make an artist. He’s good and generous always. It’s this, Guldviva, it’s the picture. I know I can do it!”

He stopped abruptly.

“The picture,” she repeated, looking up at him.

He stopped short, looking off at the dim gray and gold outline of buildings across the bay, the pale amethyst haze that hung over the dusky, shadowed old street. It had been a long day, this first one since their return. It had been full of glad excitement, the cozy breakfast party, the dodging of reporters who were only too keen, now that the news had come out about his voyage to Varlo, to question him, the meeting again with the woman who would always be his mother, and who was always through everything patient and confident, and now the peace of being alone with Guldviva in the old, old street at twilight. Above all, the chance to speak of that which even during the wild ride from Varlo had been always with him.

“The picture,” he said again, impatience in his voice. “I’m so tired of just thinking and thinking about it. I can’t explain even to you, but I know

I can do it, I can paint it—create it, a picture of you, Guldviva, in the birch forest with Sno Konung and the wolf. You with the scarlet scarf about your neck, and bark of the silver forest—scarlet. I can do it, Guldviva, do you understand? I must not wait, not a day, I must start to-morrow. Promise that you will stand by me, you will understand. Don't say that I am young and that I have not studied enough. I know that it has come with inspiration——”

She had never known him to say so much before and she of the few words found it difficult to answer him. After a moment, she touched his arm.

“I understand. I will stand by you. It will be just as you wish and for me it will hold all that is dearest, the birch forest, Sno Konung, and my friend.”

CHAPTER XXVI

"YOU WILL TOUCH THE WORLD"

STELLA was waiting at the great Central Station for Audrey to return from the visit to her aunt in the south of Sweden. She had left two days after the return of Nore and Guldviva, eager, excited, hating to leave them all. Nore and Stella had said good-by to her at the train, and as Stella stood there in the great, crowded station in the chill dusk, she wished that Nore had come to welcome his cousin back.

"He would if he remembered. He's just forgotten. He has painted all the time, all day, every day in that old room in Ridderholm, the one his uncle used to have. I do not think he has eaten or slept, he is as though he were only alive to that one thing, the picture of Guldviva in the birch forest. It is as though nothing else mattered, the strange time in Varlo, all of that. He thinks only of that picture, it is almost as though it were his life," Stella thought wistfully.

It was strange being alone there in the great, foreign station, strange, and a little hard. Everything would be changing soon. She and Audrey

were to meet Mr. Bradford in Copenhagen. Nore and Domski would soon be going back to Paris.

Some one came up to her, speaking her name, and, turning, she saw that it was Nore.

"I was thinking of you, of us all, and how soon it would all be over," she said, her voice a little tremulous. She longed to tell him more of all it had meant to her, this midwinter time in the north-land, and as though he understood much of all that she was feeling, he said:

"I, too, was thinking of it all and I feel as though it were all just beginning, as though we would all have many adventures together. You and Audrey will be coming to Paris?"

"And Guldviva, what will she do?"

Stella spoke impulsively, sensing, too, something of sadness in her friend's voice.

"Guldviva and Sno Konung will be with my mother and the girls at the flat in Ridderholm this winter. In the spring we cannot keep her from the birch forest, I know. But some time, Stella, some time she and I will share the beauty of the world together. I tell you this as she would have me, just you, because you are such a true friend."

Deep gratitude touched Stella's heart. Nore was her best friend and he had told her his secret!

They welcomed Audrey eagerly and piloted her, bag and baggage, in a droska across the sunny city to the quaint, little, clean baker shop in Ridderholm where a merry group, Domski's party, awaited them.

Here were coffee and spicy apple cakes, plain white cups and saucers, and crisp sausage-filled rolls, gay laughter and banter, the little, old place ringing with their fresh young voices. Bjorn and Nils were there, from school, their first hours off since the holidays, Marta and Audrey, Valfried and Stella, and Ingeborg and each side of Domski, Guld-viva and Nore.

The baker's wife, waiting on them, smiled indulgently at the burst of applause as she carried in a platter of coffee ice cream stuck with butterscotch quills.

"The same as the party in the castle on the rocks, it is in honor of Froken Audrey," announced Domski, his eyes shining.

"Domski—you darling, isn't it dear of you to remember."

Audrey rose suddenly to her feet, coffee cup in hand.

"I drink to Domski's health; three cheers for Domski."

They all rose to their feet.

"Three Swedish cheers for Domski," cried Nore. "Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!"

The last hurrah had died away in silence, when some one came into the room, some one tall and dark, with a strange, foreign face.

Before any one could speak Domski sprang to his feet.

"Three cheers for Master Eugene," he called,

his voice high with excitement, and the glad noise followed.

It was exactly the sort of situation that Master Eugene loved, coming upon them all that way in the midst of their jolly party in the dusky little baker shop. He had heard from Fru Carlson where they were and had come to find them. His nephew was dearer to him than any one in the world, in spite of his seeming casualness, and all that Fru Carlson had told him, with what he had read in the papers, filled him with many emotions.

It was the next morning that they all saw the picture on which Nore had been working, and it was the last time that they would all be together for they knew not how long.

"We'll meet next summer, all of us here. I am sure of it," Audrey said to Nore as they walked together toward the studio which Nore had rented for the fortnight.

"I hope so with all my heart. I want the castle on the rocks to bring sunshine and joy to you, Audrey—you have given it so much. I want all of us to have the fun of it all—we've always seemed to have tragedy there, instead," Nore said.

He was excited, tense, in spite of his quiet voice. They were all going to see his picture, his uncle was going to see it, but they could never know what it meant to him.

They all scrambled up the dark, winding stairs to the room where two years ago Master Eugene had

painted. Guldviva was there waiting for them, the picture was waiting.

They came in quietly, the cold northern morning touching the old room with a light like silver. Guldviva was standing by the window and she turned toward them with a little cry of welcome, but they did not see her. They did not see anything at all but a silver birch forest at sunset in midwinter, and coming toward them through it, a girl in gray with a scarlet scarf about her throat, and in her arms a great white cat, and crouching in the pink-shadowed snow, a wolf. It was a breathless thing, a living thing; it was beauty!

Master Eugene came a little closer, lifting his snow-touched cap and holding it in his hands. He bowed his head a little.

"You will touch the world, Nore," he said quietly.

He spoke truly.

Midsummer

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